

MRS. BRADLEY SERIES

PRINTER'S ERROR



GLADYS
MITCHELL

PRINTER'S ERROR

Titles by Gladys Mitchell

Speedy Death (1929)
The Mystery of a Butcher's Shop (1929)
The Longer Bodies (1930)
The Saltmarsh Murders (1932)
Death at the Opera (1934)
The Devil at Saxon Wall (1935)
Dead Men's Morris (1936)
Come Away, Death (1937)
St. Peter's Finger (1938)
Printer's Error (1939)
Brazen Tongue (1940)
Hangman's Curfew (1941)
When Last I Died (1941)
Laurels Are Poison (1942)
Sunset Over Soho (1943)
The Worsted Viper (1943)
My Father Sleeps (1944)
The Rising of the Moon (1945)
Here Comes a Chopper (1946)
Death and the Maiden (1947)
The Dancing Druids (1948)
Tom Brown's Body (1949)
Groaning Spinney (1950)
The Devil's Elbow (1951)
The Echoing Strangers (1952)
Merlin's Furlong (1953)
Faintley Speaking (1954)
On Your Marks (1954)

Watson's Choice (1955)
Twelve Horses and the Hangman's Noose (1956)
The Twenty-Third Man (1957)
Spotted Hemlock (1958)
The Man Who Grew Tomatoes (1959)
Say It with Flowers (1960)
The Nodding Canaries (1961)
My Bones Will Keep (1962)
Adders on the Heath (1963)
Death of a Delft Blue (1964)
Pageant of Murder (1965)
The Croaking Raven (1966)
Skeleton Island (1967)
Three Quick and Five Dead (1968)
Dance to Your Daddy (1969)
Gory Dew (1970)
Lament for Leto (1971)
A Hearse on May-Day (1972)
The Murder of Busy Lizzie (1973)
A Javelin for Jonah (1974)
Winking at the Brim (1974)
Convent on Styx (1975)
Late, Late in the Evening (1976)
Noonday and Night (1977)
Fault in the Structure (1977)
Wraiths and Changelings (1978)
Mingled with Venom (1978)
Nest of Vipers (1979)
The Mudflats of the Dead (1979)
Uncoffin'd Clay (1980)
The Whispering Knights (1980)
The Death-Cap Dancers (1981)
Lovers, Make Moan (1981)
Here Lies Gloria Mundy (1982)
Death of a Burrowing Mole (1982)
The Greenstone Griffins (1983)

Cold, Lone and Still (1983)
No Winding-Sheet (1984)
The Crozier Pharaohs (1984)

Gladys Mitchell writing as Malcolm Torrie

Heavy as Lead (1966)

Late and Cold (1967)

Your Secret Friend (1968)

Shades of Darkness (1970)

Bismarck Herrings (1971)

PRINTER'S ERROR

GLADYS MITCHELL

 **THOMAS & MERCER**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Text copyright © The Executors of the Estate of Gladys Mitchell 1939
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher.

Published by Thomas & Mercer Seattle 2013
www.apub.com

First published Great Britain in 1939 by Michael Joseph Amazon, the Amazon logo, and Thomas & Mercer are trademarks of Amazon.com, Inc., or its affiliates.

E-ISBN: 9781477868805

A Note about this E-Book

The text of this book has been preserved from the original British edition and includes British vocabulary, grammar, style, and punctuation, some of which may differ from modern publishing practices. Every care has been taken to preserve the author's tone and meaning, with only minimal changes to punctuation and wording to ensure a fluent experience for modern readers.

Contents

[CHAPTER 1 The House by the Brook](#)
[CHAPTER 2 The Travelling Sign-Painter](#)
[CHAPTER 3 The Packing Department](#)
[CHAPTER 4 Private Investigation](#)
[CHAPTER 5 The Corpse on the Coke-Heap](#)
[CHAPTER 6 The Case of William Prynne](#)
[CHAPTER 7 The House on the Ridge](#)
[CHAPTER 8 The Nudist Sanctuary](#)
[CHAPTER 9 The Written Word Remains](#)
[CHAPTER 10 Psychological Evidence](#)
[CHAPTER 11 External Evidence](#)
[CHAPTER 12 Conclusions of an Expert](#)
[CHAPTER 13 The Moving Finger](#)
[CHAPTER 14 The Margin of Error](#)
[About the Author](#)

• CHAPTER 1 •

The House by the Brook

“But at that Dolorous and awful Stroke the castle racked and rove throughout, and all the walls fell crashed and breaking to the earth...”

•1•

Behind the market cross there was a horse-trough, and almost at the southern end of the horse-trough was the only public telephone box in the village except for the two in the post office. Beside the box there was a long path leading, beside a swift-flowing brook, to the church.

Children and lovers haunted the path by the brook, each to some extent impeding the other in the prosecution of what appeared to both to be necessary and desirable ends. An occasional nursemaid sat on a seat and read paper-backed literature or did a little spasmodic knitting, and Mr. Justus Bassin walked alertly down the middle of the path except at such times as he was compelled to step aside to avoid bumping into a pram or kicking over a jam-jar full of water, sticklebacks, and minnows.

Mr. Bassin was a solicitor, but did not look like one. His father was also a solicitor, and he had taken Justus into the business some year and a half previously, and was as proud of his athletic prowess as of his brains. The alert energy and

long swift strides of the young man took him rapidly past the village school, which had been erected in 1892 on the opposite side of the brook; past a long paddock with a solitary lamb, attached by rope to a large kennel; past a stretch of waste, lush land which lay at the bottom of somebody's garden but was usually water-logged and boggy; past two white gates which gave on to white bridges, privately owned, and again led to gardens of large houses; past a small orchard on the opposite side to the brook, and so to his destination.

This was a fine old house of mellowed brick reminiscent of peaches on sunny walls, and basking cats, and yellow wall-flowers, and one came upon it suddenly, like a gap in a grove of green.

The front of the house faced the brook, which here was clean over stones and was walled in on the house side so that it could not encroach upon the close-cut lawn or the sweep of a semi-circular gravel path. This path was wide enough for a car, and, except for a narrow flower-bed, bordered the wall of the house.

The garage could be approached only on foot, however, from the path Mr. Bassin was on, for the bridge was not wide enough for a car, neither was the footpath by which he had come. He paused upon sighting the house; then he opened the gate and crossed the three-plank bridge.

He had been to the house once before—to a tennis party—but he had been a boy of sixteen then, and had but the vaguest recollection of his host and hostess. He did retain, however, a very vivid memory of their hospitality, which had been, in a schoolboy's opinion, some of the very finest and most open-handed that he had ever experienced.

It was with feelings of pleasure and ease of mind that he walked up to the wide front door, therefore, and it was with a considerable degree of confidence that he twisted the screw-like brass projection, which operated the door-bell.

He heard the bell ring. There ensued that slight and scarcely appreciable interval in which a pretty maid-servant glances at her reflection and settles her cap, and then the door was opened and he was admitted.

He was, of course, expected, but he was scarcely prepared for the pretty maid to say, in the heartfelt tones which might properly he thought have been employed in addressing, perhaps, the family doctor, but hardly the youthful and inexperienced son of the family solicitor:

“Oh, sir, we *are* so pleased to see you! Excuse me; I’ll run and tell them.”

Moreover, run she literally did, for he saw her, his hat and his neat umbrella clutched in her hand. She was back in an instant, too.

“This way, sir, please.” He could hear her slight catch of the breath on the last word, as though, instead of the usual courtesy, she was actually pleading with him not to turn tail and desert them.

In spite of his so-far treacherous memory, he recognised his client’s wife as soon as he entered the large and gracious room. She was a woman of late middle age, almost as tall as he was, and with the kind of mature loveliness which young men like in women who are about the same age as their mothers; a gracious and beautiful woman who had been no stranger to sorrow and perhaps to hardship, and who had not been warped by either.

“I’m so glad to see you, Justus,” she said simply. She gave him her hand, and then, still holding his, she led him over to one of the deep armchairs. “Sit down, while I tell you some more about our troubles.”

She rang the bell, and ordered tea. It was then about half-past three.

“We’ve been threatened, all of us, as I told you; the servants as well,” she said.

“Villagers?”

"I don't think so. Neither does Fortinbras. I'm sorry to be so abrupt about it, but it's worrying. I'll get the letters and show you."

"Why don't you go to the police?"

"I did go, although Fortinbras said it was nonsense, and didn't want to bother. They've promised to keep an eye on us, but I don't feel safe. It's too vague. The whole thing is vague. That's why I don't much like it. The threats are definite. You'll see."

She went into the adjoining room through folding doors, and he heard her open a drawer.

"Now," she said, returning, "here we are."

He took the letters from her hand, and, before he opened them, asked:

"How long have you been receiving these?"

"For a fortnight. You'll see by the postmarks, which are all quite clear."

He began to look at the envelopes.

"I see that you've collected up the communications sent to the servants as well."

"Yes. One idea we have is that the person responsible for the letters doesn't really intend to do us any physical harm; he only wants to annoy us by frightening our servants away—a horribly inconvenient thing nowadays, especially in a place like this, where girls prefer the Falshanger factories, anyway, to domestic service here in the village."

"Have you any clue to the identity of this person, by the way?" asked Mr. Bassin, lifting his clear eyes for a moment from their careful scrutiny of the envelopes. She smiled and shook her head.

"You know what Fortinbras is like," she said. "I think he's one of the most opinionated, self-centred men I know. He's a darling, but he's very trying. He has a great many enemies—more, probably, than he knows."

"But no literary critic, however harsh, makes the kind of enemies who would threaten his life?" said Mr. Bassin, who

had perused, by this time, two or three of the letters.

"Oh, doesn't he?" said the literary critic's wife with a short laugh. "There are men, and women, too, in London, who would poison his cocktails tomorrow, if they knew how to do it without being found out."

"These letters, though," went on the young solicitor, reading one or two more, "appear to be on the subject of one particular piece of work to which violent exception is taken. What is this *Open-Bellied Mountain* which is referred to so bitterly in the letters of June third and June fourth?"

"Oh, it's a book which Fortinbras is having printed privately. It must be the title which has upset somebody, I should imagine, because no one except ourselves and the printers know anything about it."

"The book is not in circulation yet, then?"

"No. It's at the printers' now. Geoffrey Saxant and his refugee partner, Kurt Senss, are doing it. They are charging pretty steeply for it, too, because they don't really want to be bothered with private orders for a hundred copies on handmade paper. It isn't in their line, and they say it won't pay them, even at the price they are charging. They've only accepted the job to oblige Fortinbras, although he doesn't believe it."

"Then, if it's not even published, and if the impression is limited to a hundred copies—"

"I know. We've racked our brains, and made lists and lists of the most improbable people as well as all those that we *know* have a grouse, but—" She shrugged her shoulders. "Besides," she added, "it isn't only the 'Mountain' book. You'll see."

At this moment tea was brought in.

"Oh, Ethel," said her mistress, "you might bring me the locked cash-box, which is on the dressing chest in Mr. Carn's room."

"Yes, madam."

The box, when it came, proved to be about two feet long, a foot wide, and nine or ten inches high.

"Corrected galleys of the book," Mrs. Carn explained. "I want you to take charge of this, if you will. The other corrected copy is already in the hands of the printers. Fortinbras is very anxious you should have charge of it."

Surprised by the commission, young Mr. Bassin agreed to take over the cash-box, and it was placed near his chair on the floor. His hostess then took the key of the box out of a large vase on the mantelpiece and handed it to him.

"You may like to have a look at the proofs," she suggested, "when you get to London. They are an exact copy of the book as it is to be published."

"Have the police seen these letters?"

"Yes, they've seen all of them, and Fortinbras has let them keep copies. He wanted to keep the originals himself. We have received none since Wednesday. The last one, as you see, is addressed to Fortinbras, and gives him a week in which to cancel the order for the printing."

"And there is a clause about the destiny of the proofs, I see. The anonymous writer wants to destroy them himself."

"Yes. Or—herself. Fortinbras is disliked by a great many people of both sexes. I refer to the literary world, of course."

"Quite," said Bassin, nodding.

"Ah, but I want to emphasise that," she added. "My husband is a good man in many ways, Justus. His social work, for instance. It isn't generally known, but he takes a deep and genuinely humanitarian interest in social experiments. It's only his own kind who hate him."

"Yes." Bassin raised his eyes again when he had folded the last letter and had put it back in the envelope. He drank some tea and ate a piece of bread and butter slowly and thoughtfully, as though he were solemnly weighing all that he had read and she had said. Actually he was doing nothing of the sort. He was merely racking his brain to discover, if he could, why Mrs. Carn had sent for him at all,

and why, if the answer to that question was that she wished him to take official charge of the corrected proofs in the cash-box, she had not brought them to London herself, for she had been in Town two days previously. If she merely wanted them taken care of, as simple a plan, he thought, would have been to lodge them at the bank.

"I expect you wonder why I've brought you down here," she remarked, taking his cup to give him some more tea. "I'll tell you: I would have brought the proofs and the letters to you on Thursday, when I came up to Town to do some shopping, but that Fortinbras absolutely forbade it. He's more perturbed about the letters, I believe, than he wants to show. He's afraid I might be attacked if it were known that I was carrying them."

"The thing is," said young Mr. Bassin—making a statement which his wiser, more wily, more experienced father certainly would not have made—"that you're keeping information from me, Mrs. Carn. There's more behind this than just these threatening letters. Why don't you tell me all you can?"

She handed him a plate of cakes, watched him select one, waited until it was on his plate, and then said calmly:

"Yes, there is more. It isn't that I intend to keep anything from you, but it's difficult to explain. I'm afraid it will sound fantastic."

"I think the threats themselves are fantastic, Mrs. Carn."

"Do you? I see what you mean. It's what I said—they're vague."

"No. I find them explicit. Take this very first letter for instance. It says:

"'Do you know what happened to William Prynne?'"

"Yes."

"Now take one of those received by the servants. It doesn't really matter which. All of them are much the same. This one reads:

"'Would you like to see your master's ears?'"

“Yes.”

“Well, putting those two letters together—or any other two or more that you like to pick out—”

He removed all the letters—there were thirteen of them—from their envelopes, flattened a cushion, placed it beside him on the high end of the settee, and spread the letters out on it—“what do we get? Threats, certainly. What we may call veiled threats. They all refer to one particular case, the case of William Prynne, the Puritan pamphleteer of the reign of Charles I, who lost his ears, was branded, fined, imprisoned, and put to death for his persistence in writing and publishing tracts. That’s so, isn’t it?”

“So Fortinbras says. That’s why we’re pretty sure that it’s this book which is the root of the trouble.”

“I don’t see why you should make that deduction. I can’t see that these letters point to the book any more than to any other of Mr. Carn’s writings to which someone may have taken exception. Isn’t it more likely that something already published and in print has roused this sort of feeling than something that is still at the printers? Unless, as I say, you haven’t told me everything.”

“I’ve just got this feeling about the book. You see, it’s not a very nice book, really. You’ll see, tonight.”

“I’m to take the proofs away with me, then, go through them, decide, from the internal evidence (if any) which persons seem to have reasonable cause for grievance—and then, what?”

“You don’t take the threats seriously, do you?” she said.

“You won’t let me,” he replied, and once more lifted his candid, disquieting eyes to her face. She laughed, and suddenly gave in.

“I *am* keeping something back,” she said. “Another letter. Not one of—” she indicated his neat arrangement of manuscripts on the cushion—“the series. I can’t show it to you, though, unless Fortinbras agrees, and he isn’t at home. He’s lecturing in Southampton, and I don’t expect him until

ten or eleven tonight. You'll be back in London by then, won't you?"

"I need not be. I am at your disposal. I need only send a telegram to my father."

"Would you really stay?" Her eagerness seemed out of all proportion to the point at issue until he recollected that, in spite of her apparent calmness, she was a frightened woman who knew something more about what, at first sight, appeared to be a common form of persecution, than, so far, she had told him.

He smiled.

"My father would want me to do anything I could," he replied. Both were silent for a minute after that. It was a statement with implications, for his father had been in love with her, and for a long time—two years or more, he had heard—she had hesitated between the steady, kindly Bassin and the brilliant, headstrong, more obviously attractive Carn.

"I'm sure he would," she said, putting her hand for a moment upon the young man's sleeve. "Go and send your telegram, then, unless you'd rather have one of the servants go. I'll tell them to get a room ready."

"I'd rather go," said Bassin. "I shall have to get a toothbrush and things."

He rose, and, placing the cash-box carefully at the end of the settee (although leaving it still upon the floor), he put the key in his pocket and went to the door. He glanced round to say something else to Mrs. Carn but her back was towards him and she was looking out of the window, so he opened the door, closed it quietly behind him, and soon was walking past the windows. She was still standing where he had left her, and she waved to him as he went by.

Young Bassin with his long stride soon reached the village again. He sent off his telegram, bought a toothbrush and shaving things, and then, trusting that he would be able

to borrow pyjamas from his host, he returned to the House by the Brook.

This time the sounds of confusion met his ears the moment he crossed the little bridge, and he saw that the large window from which Mrs. Carn had waved to him had been shattered. Through the great ragged gap in the glass the unnerving noise of hysterical servants made him quicken into a run.

He rang the front-door bell, but, beyond a scream of fright, this attracted no attention, so he ran round to the smashed window and looked in.

A tall vase of flowers was lying broken on the floor, and near it was the senseless body of Mrs. Carn. Servants crowded the doorway, except for one, more courageous because more kindly than the rest, who was kneeling beside her mistress and raising her head. It was obvious that the accident, however it had been caused, could not have occurred more than a few minutes before Bassin had crossed the little bridge.

Carefully avoiding the jagged edges of the glass, he stepped into the room where his hostess lay amid the fragments of the broken vase and the strewn flowers. The water had soaked into her summer dress and into the carpet, and her own blood still seeped heavily and, it seemed, reluctantly, from a gash on the side of her head.

The servants could give no account of what had happened. One and all agreed upon the obvious, which was that Mrs. Carn had been attacked, and the writer of the anonymous letters was cited as her most probable assailant. Bassin, when he had ascertained that someone had already gone for the doctor, glancing round the room, deduced the same thing, for another reason besides that which they were able to give: the cash-box, which he remembered leaving at the end of the settee, was gone, and Mrs. Carn herself had had no reason, in the short time he had been

absent, for moving it from its position. There was also no sign of the letters, which he had spread out.

The doctor who had been summoned was out, so Bassin sent the gardener to the doctor's house again with orders to wait there until the doctor arrived home, and then to bring him immediately upon a plea of extreme urgency. He would have gone himself, but with the master of the house still absent, he felt that he ought to remain in charge, if only for the sake of the servants, towards whom he felt some responsibility, for they were nearly all young, and most of them were very badly frightened. He wanted to be certain, too, that nothing was touched before the arrival of the police, for whom he had also sent.

He was certain in his own mind (although he tried to reassure the maids) that Mrs. Carn's injury was a fatal one. In this opinion he was confirmed by the doctor, who arrived about two minutes before the police turned up, having driven up to his own door just as the gardener got there for the second time.

The blow, it was thought, had been delivered with the cash-box itself, and Mrs. Carn, who died without recovering consciousness, probably had not known who had struck her.

•2•

There were no surprises at the inquest, except for the inexplicable absence of the husband of the deceased woman. The police, after formal evidence had been taken, asked to have the enquiry adjourned. The anticipated verdict of Murder against Person or Persons Unknown was reached by the coroner's jury, and young Bassin, who had remained in the village, but not at Carn's house, found himself at liberty to return to London, at any rate

temporarily. His father, however, sent him back, with instructions to place himself at the service of Mr. Carn should the latter choose to avail himself of his assistance.

Since the early morning of the day of the inquest, however, Mr. Carn had disappeared. He had arrived home at ten minutes past ten on the night of his wife's death, and had received the news from a sympathetic but inquisitive police officer, who required him to account for his movements all day from the time he had left his home just before lunch. The servants also had been very closely questioned.

Out of this gentle but persistent enquiry, the most interesting fact (not made public at the inquest) that arose was that lunch was on the point of being served when Mr. Carn had elected to go out.

There was no evidence that he had had a sudden quarrel with his wife, nor that he had received a telegram or any other communication which might have caused him to leave the house in a hurry, but the parlour-maid and the cook both corroborated the story told by the gardener, which was that at five minutes to one—the church clock had struck one, and it was always five minutes fast, the police established—his employer, hurrying, and without his hat, had crossed the little bridge and had walked rapidly in the direction of the village.

Where he had been, and for what purpose, nobody knew, unless the police had been told. If they possessed this information, they did not give it away, even to the reporters, who were soon upon the trail.

Mr. Carn, however, had since disappeared. He had told the police that he had been due to lecture in Southampton, but that he had failed to keep this appointment; he was not in court to be called as a witness at the inquest, and the closest enquiry afterwards failed to establish his whereabouts. He had disappeared neatly and cleanly, leaving no trace behind, and again had gone off without a

hat, for not only could all his hats be accounted for, but even the new one, in which he had arrived home on the night of his wife's death, was hanging on the hat-stand in the hall.

Young Bassin telephoned these details to his father and received further instructions to remain upon the spot. He was glad to obey, for he had liked Mrs. Carn, and he was young enough to want to help in tracking down the person responsible for her death. He also felt considerable curiosity as to the contents of the cash-box. In it, he was certain, was the clue to the attack, and to the disappearance of Carn.

A seventeenth-century inn, its parlour unspoiled, and the bedroom over it reputed to be haunted by the ghost of a former landlord, appealed to him as a reasonable place in which to stay, and he put up there, while the police clues to the murderer of Mrs. Carn gradually petered out, and those to the whereabouts of Mr. Carn remained undiscovered, and probably, said the local inspector, were non-existent. There was a warrant out for Mr. Carn's arrest, and his brother came to live in his house.

Young Mr. Bassin gave the second Mr. Carn his temporary address in the village, and after four days of fruitless speculation (indulged in whilst he climbed the hills and explored the footpaths of the neighbourhood) had to confess that he was baffled. He did not share the opinion of the inspector in charge of the case, who was anxious to apprehend Mr. Carn for the wilful murder of his wife, but took up his own line of enquiry, which was based on the now speculative contents of the cash-box.

Clues such as footprints and fingerprints he wisely left to the police. Mr. Carn's movements on the day of his wife's death he also left unchecked. That, again was a task more fitted to the police system than to his own. He did, however, go to the printing works where *The Open-Bellied Mountain* was being set up, and ask to see the manager.

The foreign partner received him, and took him all over the works. They were large, but the plant and methods were modern, and Kurt Senss, a tall, stiff, sensitive, nervous man, talked rapidly but interestingly, and obviously was in love with his work.

Mr. Bassin had stated his business at the outset. He wanted galleys of Carn's book. These were promised immediately, and, when the tour of the works was completed, Senss produced a set of galleys and waved aside—a generous sweep of the arm—the young man's thanks.

"We knew Mr. Carn quite well," he said. "His wife, too, I have met. It is all a revenge act. When you read, perhaps you will see."

Triumphantly Bassin carried home the proofs—long, unmanageable sheets of printed matter at the stage before they were actually made up into pages and bound in book form. He had the haunted bedroom—his own choice, for the inn was by no means full—and spread them out on his knees after he got into bed.

The bed itself was modern, and comfortable enough. He plumped a pillow against the headboard and rested his back against it, turned slightly towards the light, which shone not immediately on to the bed but on to a small table beside it, and then, pencil in hand, he commenced to go through the proofs.

If his deductions were so far right, and if Senss were right, within the proofs of Carn's book lay the explanation of Carn's disappearance, the anonymous letters, and Mrs. Carn's death.

• CHAPTER 2 •

The Travelling Sign-Painter

“‘Nevertheless,’ said Sir Gawain, ‘let us at once encounter them, and see what they can do.’”

• 1 •

A week before Mrs. Carn's death and her husband's so-far unaccountable disappearance, Mrs. Bradley went by car into Oxfordshire to visit her nephew Carey. She found him, as usual, preoccupied with his pigs. The Scandinavian pig-breeders had been experimenting with a new type of movable pig-pen, and Carey, always interested in any improvement which might result in the increased well-being of his pigs, had sent for a test specimen, and, pipe in mouth, was admiring it in company with his pigman.

“Hullo, darling,” he observed, when he saw the small but gaily-clad figure of his aunt, attended closely by her chauffeur George, carrying her coat. Mrs. Bradley cackled in reply to this greeting, and Carey resumed his preoccupied attitude. George stood at ease behind his employer, and the pigman, an exceptionally ugly fellow, stared stolidly at the mud on his own boots. He was not, apparently, interested in his employer, his employer's relatives, their chauffeurs, or even in the new movable pig-pen which confronted him in all its Scandinavian cleanliness and squareness.

"Um," said Carey at last, "put Beulah in it, Priest."

"Detch don't thenk Beaully," observed the pigman morosely.

"Tell Ditch to go to the devil, but not in front of Mrs. Ditch."

The pigman did not reply, but slouched towards the house, hitching his rounded shoulders.

"So you've taken on Priest?" said Mrs. Bradley.

"He's the only chap in these parts who can manage my prize Tamworth boar. A real *beauty*, Aunt Adela! Come and look."

He was about to lead her away when a girl appeared at the gate of the field and stood there crying his name. Carey turned and waved, and then grinned apologetically at his aunt.

"I shall get it in the neck, darling, if I begin carting you all over the place before I take you up to the house. So shall we go along?"

"He ought to have a change," said his young wife when they were having tea. "Pigs, pigs, pigs! Nothing but pigs all his life! And I've got the most gorgeous invitation for us both to go and stay in Cornwall for a month or two. It would be just the thing for Timothy, and this great brute won't come."

The baby, aged six months, chuckled at the sound of his own name.

"There you are," said Jenny, accusingly, to her husband, "he wants to go to Cornwall if you don't."

"Well, angel, take him. I shall be all right here. Mrs. Ditch looked after me before I was married, and she can look after me again."

"Yes, but I can't let you go on, year after year, without a holiday, can I, Aunt Adela? It isn't reasonable."

"The thing is," said Mrs. Bradley, "that he wants a different kind of holiday from the one you suggest."

"Well, he can have it, but I won't go off and leave him here by himself."

"Slosh and balderdash."

"It isn't. Would you go for a holiday on your own?"

"Yes. There's a holiday I've always wanted to have—tramping around painting inn-signs."

"A very good idea," said Mrs. Bradley briskly. "And if it will ease your mind, child, I'll remain here for a bit, and keep an eye on the pigs."

"I say! You wouldn't, would you?"

"With the greatest of pleasure. I, too, need a holiday. I will study the psychology of pigs instead of that of German-Jewish refugees."

"Comparisons are odious," observed Carey, leaning over and putting his fist on to his son's chest. The baby crowed and wriggled. Mrs. Bradley grinned.

"A fortnight, then?" said Carey, turning his head. "How's that, Jenny? And then, if you like, I'll come for a week to Cornwall?"

"No, you needn't. I know you don't want to. You can come back here at the end of the fortnight and cuddle your beastly pigs."

•2•

Mr. Bassin got up at half-past ten, having perused the galleys carefully for the third time, looked at the glass downstairs in the parlour now entitled the lounge, tapped it, decided that the day would be wet, and went upstairs again for his mackintosh, which he had slung over his towel-rail, he remembered.

The chambermaid had removed it from this unorthodox place, and had hung it up for him. By the time he reached

the lounge again he found that it was occupied by a stranger. A man of about his own age or a little more was standing on the white hearth of the huge old fireplace, and was gazing up the chimney. As Bassin came down the last dog's-leg bend of the staircase, the stranger turned round and emerged, but did not look in Bassin's direction.

"Pint of beer, please," he said, pulling out a pipe.

"Sorry I can't serve you," said Bassin, "but there's a bell just to your right."

The other man looked up, his finger poised above the bowl. He laughed. He was thin and of about middle height, had dark-blue eyes, dark hair, and an unshaven but attractively lean face.

"Oh—hullo!" he said. "I take it that you are not the proprietor, then?"

"Staying here, that's all."

"Ah! Good place to stay?"

"Quite. Very good, in fact."

"Ah! Beer for you, too?"

"All right, thanks, I think I will. Although I've only just got up, as a matter of fact."

"Stout chap. I am not a believer in early rising, either."

"Oh, I'm generally up before this. I've been working in bed, that's all."

"Working?"

"Well, sort of."

The maid came at this moment, so they broke off to order the beer. When they had received it, and the girl had disappeared again, Bassin said, a little awkwardly:

"I'd like to tell you about it. You don't come from these parts, do you?"

"No. Stanton St. John in Oxfordshire."

"Know anybody around here?"

"Yes, my old housemaster. Retired."

"Oh, that's all right. I don't think the thing is a secret. Anyway, it's been in the papers for a week."

"Not the local murder?"

"Yes, of course."

"Meaning to say you done it?"

"My father is Mr. Carn's solicitor. I was the bloke who, in the newspaper parlance, had had my first introduction (my second, actually) to the fatal room that very afternoon."

"So you're What's-his-name?"

"Yes."

"And you were to have been given the missing cash-box and the anonymous letters?"

"Yes."

"But before you returned from wiring to your father that you wouldn't be home that night, somebody jumped through the window and—"

"Yes. You seem to have a pretty good idea of the thing."

"I've an aunt in the business. Ever heard of Mrs. Beatrice Lestrangle Bradley?"

"Of course. Everybody has. You don't mean you've got her in the family?"

"Rather. Right in its bosom, too. We're all very fond of Aunt Adela. My name's Lestrangle. I'm on her first husband's side. Ferdinand Lestrangle is my cousin."

"Good heavens! I say, you might be the answer to a prayer."

"I probably am. Not a maiden's prayer, though. I happen to be married and done for."

"Well, if you've got time to listen, let me unbelt this tale. I'd love to put the problem in front of somebody else, and, if you wouldn't mind, I should think you're just the chap."

"My days are my own. Half a minute. More beer."

They ordered it, and the girl set it down on a glass-topped table.

"Now then," said Bassin, taking out his pipe and offering Carey the matches. "I won't ask you to read the bally things—at least, not yet—but the thing is, you see—"

“Rummy sort of tale,” said Carey, when Bassin had laid all the facts before him. “And Mrs. Carn didn’t give you the slightest hint that she knew who had written the letters? I mean, sometimes the recipients of anonymous letters have a pretty good hunch as to the sender.”

“I’m sure she didn’t know. Hadn’t the foggiest, in fact. You see, the letters obviously referred to the book, and I don’t suppose she knew much about the book. It’s not a book a woman would care about, I’d say.”

“Oh, but you can’t argue like that. I mean, people aren’t, so to speak, divided into two sexes intellectually, are they? I should say it’s impossible to find a book that all men like and all women don’t. It depends on the individual.”

“Yes... Look here, Lestrangle, would you have time and inclination to read these galleys if I lent them to you, say, for a couple of days? You see, the solution lies somewhere in the book, I’m pretty sure, My own impression is that Carn is also dead, and the next thing I’m expecting to hear is that somebody is making an attempt to cancel the order for the printing. Somebody is pretty keen to make certain that the book never gets before the public. I ought to warn you, too, to keep it dark that you’ve got the galleys, if you do take them. You may be running a risk by having a copy of the book in your possession—I don’t know.”

“I’ll take a chance,” said Carey. He finished his beer whilst Bassin went upstairs to get the proofs, and, when he received them from him, he went over to a large assorted bundle consisting of rucksack and sketching materials, and pushed the galleys into his raincoat pocket. It was a large pocket with a gusset, and it accommodated the paper-covered proofs without difficulty. Carey put the raincoat on, promised to return the proofs by registered post or by hand at the end of forty-eight hours, if not sooner, dressed himself in his impediments, rather after the manner of the White Knight, and waved his hand in farewell.

Bassin, pipe in mouth, went to the inn door, and stood there gazing after him until he swung off to the left at the end of the village street and disappeared. Bassin then put on his own raincoat, for the sky still threatened, picked up his ashplant, and went in the opposite direction; he was bound for the House by the Brook. It had occurred to him that there might be people in the neighbourhood who could be persuaded to tell him things, which they had not seen fit to tell the police. He also thought that it would lend interest to his solitary walks, if they had a definite object. This, he decided, should be a quest of the cash-box. True, the police were also on its track, but it would do no harm were he to join in the search.

•3•

There was a lane beside the House by the Brook, and on the other side of it a small farm. To the farm belonged the paddock containing the lamb, a small orchard at the eastern end of the paddock, and a duck-pond and untidy farmyard on the other side of the path. The duck-pond was a part of the brook wired in at either end to prevent the ducks from straying, and widening out into a scooped muddy basin with one steep side flanked by the pathway railing, and one gently sloping side up to the muddy farmyard.

A bridge and culvert carried the lane across the water, and up the grassy trackway bitten into by two deep grooves made by cart-wheels walked Bassin to reach the side-gate.

He crossed the farmyard and went up to the door. A couple of Buff Orpington hens fled squawking at his approach, a large, rough-haired dog looked dubiously at him and then flung itself out on the end of its chain in his

direction, and a calf, in a small cowshed, hearing strange footfalls, but seeing nobody, began to bellow for its mother.

A little girl with shoes but no stockings, a cropped but untidy head, and a dirty but intelligent face, came round from the far side of a water-butt and accosted him.

"Mother's out."

"Father?"

"Gone to market."

"Anybody else about the place?"

"Me and Diddle."

"Diddle?"

The child scorned to reply, but raised her hand and impelled a terrifying screech in the direction of the house. A youth of about seventeen emerged. He was half-witted, it seemed.

"Diddle," said Mr. Bassin, "did you see the man with the big black box?"

"Ah," replied the moron with a leer.

"Which way did he go?"

"Over that way," said the little girl, pointing along the path in the direction of the village. "I sen him, too, and that's the way he went."

"Thanks. Did you know him?"

"Nor."

"Never seen him before?"

"Nor, not as I knows on."

"Thanks." He gave each of them twopence, and went back to the path. The child, he felt sure, would know everybody in the village, and probably nobody else in the world. He went back to the horse-trough, walked past it and, turning to the right round the market cross, came upon another culvert. This time the little brook went under a metalled road.

Houses were clustered along this arm of the village, but there was a space where the brook ran. The stone bridge-head was so high that he could not see over it. It occurred

to him that a man in unlawful possession of someone else's large cash-box would want to be rid of the box at the very earliest opportunity.

Anything tossed over the bridge-head might remain undiscovered for years. He could see, in his mind's eye, the thief and murderer, hastening in broad daylight, away from the House by the Brook, burdened with the evidence of the crime. He could see him open the box, snatch out the contents, stuff them into his pockets...

He walked farther along the road to see whether there was any way of getting down to the water's edge at the place where the road crossed the stream.

There seemed to be no way at all, for the cottages were built in a row. He returned to the horse-trough and so to the church path. He stepped over a low railing, got down to the edge of the brook, removed his shoes and socks, turned up the ends of his trousers, and began to wade.

He reached the culvert, and even, in his zeal, ducked underneath its opening, but there was no trace of the cash-box. He searched both banks, but to no purpose.

He dried his feet on his handkerchief, resumed his shoes and socks, and walked back towards the inn for lunch. Before he reached it, however, a new thought struck him. He returned to the public call-box by the horse-trough and dialled the police station.

To a voice at the other end he replied by offering his theory that the cash-box had been tossed across the bridge-head where the brook flowed under the Allisbury-Towsley road. The voice thanked him for the suggestion, and reminded him that the thief would have had some difficulty in opening the cash-box since he himself had stated that he had trousered the key, which he had given up to the police before the inquest.

Bassin apologised for troubling them, and returned to the farm. The little girl was still there. She was paddling, not

in the water, but, with ecstasy, in the thick, slimy mud of the duck-pond. Bassin again addressed her.

"I say, this man with the box. You say you didn't know him?"

"Nor."

"Well, had you ever seen him before?"

"Nor."

"Not sneaking round the house to have a look, or anything of that kind?"

"Nor," said the child, sturdily resisting the mental effect of a leading question.

"Well, which way did he go?"

"Nor, I don't knor." She ceased regarding her ankles—her feet were invisible in the mud—and looked up in Bassin's face. "T'other gentleman give me a sixpence," she remarked. Bassin thought this an odd and unlikely proceeding on the part of the police, grinned and gave her twopence. "He went the same-ole way as you," she said simply.

"Would you know him again if you saw him? What was he like?"

"Nor, I don't knor."

"Fathead!" thought Bassin irritably, walking away. When he looked back the child was biting the edge of one of the coins he had given her, and gazing after him. He waved, but she made no response.

He walked on, pondering the problem again. If it was Carn himself who had killed his wife it was not likely that he would have chosen so unwieldy and so noticeable a burden as the cash-box. Why, also, should he have taken the trouble to gather up the letters and remove them?

"Ah, but wait!" he said aloud. An old man passing stopped and said good day. Suppose the whole thing, letters, proof and all, was so much dust thrown to conceal the fact that Carn proposed to murder his wife? He nodded to the old man, and resumed his thoughts.

The theory of Carn's guilt, whether the newspapers or the police had conceived of it, held water. He could see that. If Carn had written the anonymous letters himself he would have had good reason for wanting them destroyed. Handwriting-experts, with their magnifications and measurements, would soon make odious comparisons between the writing of the letters and his own undisguised hand, of which plenty of examples could be obtained.

If Carn were indeed the murderer, then the more spectacular the deed the better, from his point of view. To steal the letters obviously and dangerously as a climax to murdering his wife by striking her with the cash-box, was more likely to lead suspicion away from him than a quieter and (as it were) a more domestic method of attaining his ends and bringing about her death.

He tried to remember Carn, but could not do it, except for a vague mental picture of bigness, blondness, and a kind of bear-like exuberance. He retained an impression, too, of a happy man, and such, he reflected, are not, so far as has been discovered, among the most likely murderers.

Then, again, if the little girl were at all trustworthy, the man she had seen with the cash-box was not Carn, whom she would know quite well by sight, since the little farm was not thirty yards from his house. That brought the thing back to the book. He wondered what Carey would make of the esoteric essay, which set out to show that Priapus was a Hebrew deity (one of the more debased forms of Jahveh) and which lauded Thor as a good Nazi.

One thing, he reflected, the book had been very well and very carefully printed. The thin paper of the galleys gave no idea of the final appearance of the book, which was to come out on special hand-made paper, but the large clear type was beautiful in its austerity, and the only mistake he had noticed in the whole of the text was the obvious misprint of a B for a D in the German of "Thunder and Lightning."

He returned to the inn, to find that he was wanted on the telephone.

●4●

Carey sprawled happily upon the short turf of a high bare hill, and looked out over the countryside. It was almost like being in an aeroplane, for the country dwarfed almost to the scale of a map, showed a winding tree-fringed river, churches, houses, ricks, ribbon-roads and a silver reservoir, and, far off but easily distinguishable, a large town nine miles distant.

He took out his map and compared its details with the view, then laid it aside, took out a piece of bread, some cheese, and chocolate and had his midday meal. On the map he had made rings round all the inns with promising names.

So far, he had painted just one sign. That was for a man who had gone newly into the business of inn-keeping. His pub had been renamed "The Best of Three," and Carey had enjoyed himself and had imbibed much free beer of excellent quality.

He had also received the sum of ten guineas. His garish and striking sign depicted the Judgment of Paris.

The threatened rain had not come; instead, the clouds had given place, here and there, to promising rifts of blue sky. The wind has risen, but was not cold, even upon the heights. There was nobody about. It seemed as good a chance as any he was likely to get for a perusal of the galleys Bassin had given him.

His first deduction, made on page two, and one that he saw no reason to reassess, was that the writer was a confirmed and rabid anti-Semite. There was, for instance, a

jingle about Daniel-Nathaniel, Nathaniel-Daniel of presumably *Pickwick Papers* fame, but it was followed by gross and unnecessary reference to the prophet Nathan and the Hebrew king David. The story of Bathsheba and the parable of the ewe lamb were referred to, and the whole passage was couched in language, which only a private press could have tolerated.

Carey whistled a few bars of a Morris dance tune. Then he made a brief note on the margin of the page, for it had been arranged between them that this would be the easiest way for him to give Bassin his opinions, comments, and conclusions.

A few pages further on there was a short essay entitled "Coelacanth: a moral." It pointed out that the fish called by this name had remained untouched by evolution for two hundred and fifty million years. An offensive reference to the Jews followed.

Carey made another note, and read on to the end of the book. The tone was the same throughout the whole essay. Of the quality of the writing there could be no doubt. It was the work of a master. It also bore evidence, Carey thought, of being, in bestial fashion, supremely a labour of love. Every epithet had been selected, it seemed, as though a lover were selecting a bud for a bouquet. The culminated effect was remarkable. An artist himself, he appreciated the artistry of the writer. The poison plants were exquisitely chosen. The delightfully balanced prose sentences were precise and very delicate forms of torture. Carey wiped his fingers on a dry paint-rag when he had put the galleys back into his pocket, and then got up and walked a little way back on his tracks to regain the chalky path, which he had left. It led up and over the hill, southwest, in one direction, and back to the village in the other. He had made up his mind to go on, for there were several inns within easy reach of one another on the southwest side of the hill, but the perusal of the galleys had caused him to alter his plans. Backing a

fairly strong wind, he returned by the way he had come. Halfway down, a gap in a hawthorn hedge gave him a short cut across a close-cropped field on the heel of the hill. At the bottom of the field was another footpath, steep and deeply rutted, which dipped suddenly on to the road.

He crossed the bridge by the station, walked across the London road, bore on eastwards past cottages and the post office, and reached the inn at half-past three. He put his head in at the lounge door, could not see Bassin, went up to the office window, enquired for him, and was told that Mr. Bassin had been summoned by telephone to London.

Carey went to the village shop for brown paper and string, then to the post office for a letter card and to register his parcel. Before he reached the counter, however, he overheard an argument between the postmistress and the telegraph boy.

"There's nobody of the name of Lestrangle stayen at the 'Lion' I tell you, missus. My brother works there. Didden I ought to knor?"

"Well, telegram says 'Lestrangle, Lion Hotel.' Can't get away from that. Perhaps gentleman be expected there today."

"Nor, he ain't, neether. My brother was tellen me norbody ain't expected. Slacker than ever, they are. Keepen alive on the bar, and snacks to cyclists."

"You tekken it, anyhow."

"It's nor good, I tell you."

"You be Government servant, ben you?"

"Ah. Give here, then. Whaddida do with my belt?"

Carey took his parcel outside again, and beat the telegraph boy to the "Lion" by a second and a half. The telegram read:

"Keep proofs. Back in the morning. Bassin." It had been handed in at Aubery, a village about five miles off. Bassin had not gone to London. His telephone message had been from the printers. The senior partner of Saxant and Senss

wanted to see him to discuss what should be done about the book. Mr. Saxant had left the printing press at three, and Bassin had gone to his house to talk things over with him.

This Carey did not know, but, having the proofs still in his possession, he thought it might be interesting to find out from the printers whether the author had made any very drastic alterations in the book when he had corrected the proofs. It was a job, which would come within Bassin's province, he reflected, although hardly within his own. He would put it up to Bassin later. Very good printing, though. A single repeated error, and that such an obvious one that the only odd thing about it was that so careful a firm should have missed it, especially as Senss was a German, and one example came in a German word.

Having the remainder of the afternoon and evening at his disposal, he first booked a room at the "Lion" for the night, thinking that he might as well meet Bassin there on the morrow, and then deposited all his paraphernalia, including the proofs, in his room. He locked the room, deposited the key at the office, and walked to Aubery over another round hill.

Arrived there at the end of an hour and a quarter, he decided to apply at the inn, as was his custom, for permission to paint a new sign, and, whether this offer were accepted or refused, to remain in the village until the inn was open to the public, to have a pint of beer, talk pig with anyone who was knowledgeable, play darts with any who would, and get back to the "Lion" by half-past eight or so, just in time to have dinner.

He did not know whether Bassin was still in Aubery; he had no idea that Mr. Saxant, the senior partner, lived there, and he put Bassin and the galleys and the death of Mrs. Carn completely out of his mind.

The innkeeper was agreeable to have the sign repainted. The house was the "George and Dragon." Carey put in a couple of hours' work and promised to return next

day to complete it. He received his pint free of charge, talked pig, accepted, in the spirit in which it was offered, a good deal of criticism of his picture, played darts, and was about to return to the "Lion" when Bassin walked in.

He saw Carey at once, walked up to him, and took him by the arm.

"Good man," he said. "Wait a bit and have a drink with me. We can go back together in a car I've borrowed. Will you?"

"Of course," said Carey. "What's up?"

"Oh, nothing. Double brandy, please. What's yours? More beer? Come over here with it, will you?"

They sat down at a small table away from the men at the counter.

"I've been to see Saxant. He lives here," Bassin explained. "There was some question as to whether they would still print the book—issue it, rather. All the printing and most of the binding is done. You see, it's awkward, in the absence of both Carn and his wife. They appealed to Carn's brother, but he said they'd better see us. There was no proof, you see, that Carn was dead or couldn't pay, and the order for the hundred copies still stood. What's more, they had been given the names and addresses of all the people Carn wanted a copy sent to. All the copies were to go out direct from the press and not through Carn. He wasn't going to sign them, or anything, first.

"Well, my father referred Saxant to me. Said I was on the spot, more or less, gave him my address at the 'Lion,' and said I would be furnished with all necessary particulars, as, of course, I am.

"It appears—don't tell anyone this, because, professionally speaking, I ought not to spill it at all—that Carn was so pleased with himself over the beastly book—"

"I agree," said Carey.

"Eh?"

"A beastly book."

"Oh, yes, I thought so, too. And if Carn knew any Jews I should think—"

"I thought that, too, except that anti-Jewish literature is published by the ream in Germany, so that there wouldn't seem much point in doing in a chap who, in any case, was proposing to circulate only one hundred copies. Still, if some of the proposed recipients were Jews—"

"Ah, but they aren't, you know. Not a Finkelbaum among the whole lot of 'em. I've seen Saxant's list."

"Lots of Jews change their names."

"Yes, but these are people Saxant knows. He's a publisher as well as a printer, and he knows everybody. No, I can't prove it to you, without his list, but we can accept it that the people to get the copies don't number a single Jew among the lot. Besides, nobody's seen the book, generally speaking. Nobody knows what it's like except us and the printers themselves—oh, and, of course, the typist, unless Carn did the typing himself."

"By the way, the junior partner. Is he a Jew, by any chance?"

"Senss? No, he's a German all right—a Prussian, actually—but dead against the present regime. Had to hop it, in fact. But there's not a trace of Jew in him. He's a Social Democrat. That's what. I bet he's under pretty close supervision here, too, if the truth were known. There are Nazi agents everywhere. No, Saxant and Senss had only one objection to the book. They didn't think it worth their while, even at the very stiff price they charged, to print and bind a miserable hundred copies. Senss, in fact, put it to Saxant that, if the author didn't turn up again soon, or give some indication of his whereabouts, they should hold up sending out the hundred copies, print a hundred thousand instead, at half a crown or so, and make a profit on the thing. It would be bound, Senss thinks, to have a run. After all, it's fairly sensational, and people will always buy offal."

"But would the censor pass it?"

"Actually there's no censorship of books, and Saxant and Senss don't think that it would violate the law of libel or indecency or anything. It skates close but pretty, as it were, and, of course, it doesn't actually mention any names."

"No, I suppose it doesn't. Still, it's rather foul."

"Yes, I agree. Well, furnished by my father with the terms of Carn's will, I observe that he wants the book published, whether he's alive or dead, and the requisite amount of money is to be devoted to the purpose."

"Then it almost looks as though he expected to peg out before the thing was published."

"I argued that point with Saxant. Personally, I don't think so, and my father doesn't think so. He knew Carn well. I barely remember him. The man's an egoist, like all authors, and was fearfully keen, even above the average of authors, on his own work. Thought it was sacred, and so on. Wouldn't have a syllable altered, and all that sort of thing. Never would have a book filmed, for instance, although he had several good offers from Hollywood. *Littera scripta manet* sort of bloke."

"I see. Just *obiturn dicta* in the will, then, as regards the book about the Jews?"

"Yes, it seems so. And, of course, he *had* received those threatening letters, you know. I wish those hadn't been swiped along with the corrected galleys. I'd like to have seen them. For threatening letters they were odd."

"Are you an expert on threatening letters, then?"

"Not exactly. But all solicitors see them. People are not quite such fools and cowards about blackmail as they used to be, thanks, largely, to Freud and Havelock Ellis, you know."

"How my Aunt Adela would love to hear you say that."

"I wish she'd come into this with us. Do you suppose she would?"

"She would if it happened to interest her, not otherwise."

“Well, it’s become quite interesting, I should say. Again keep this under your hat. What do you think happened at Saxant’s house this afternoon?”

He did not need a reply, and Carey did not give one. He drank deeply of his beer, and watched Bassin take a good gulp of brandy.

“We are coming, I perceive,” he said, “to the explanation of your presence in this pub in front of a double cognac.”

“Yes,” said Bassin. “They asked me to have some tea; there was a good many other guests. Saxant, in fact, had come away from the works early, because his wife was having a tennis afternoon. A very good-looking, fascinating woman, by the way. Definitely Elinor Glyn. Well, tea was on the verandah, and just as we were in the middle of it, a registered parcel came for Mrs. Saxant. She, it appears, was under the impression that it was a packet of delicate seedlings she was expecting. She had been talking about them, to all of us who were near her, and we all watched the postman coming towards the house.”

“More threatening letters, actually, I suppose? Wonder who the maniac is?”

“So do I,” said Bassin. He drank some more brandy, and pushed back the empty glass. “Well, Mrs. Saxant called for scissors, and somebody gave her a small penknife, and she soon had the paper and string off. It wasn’t seedlings, of course. What the packet actually contained was—pardon me—a couple of bloody ears.”

• CHAPTER 3 •

The Packing Department

“... all the workmen, full of terror, sought out the king, and threw themselves on their faces before him, beseeching him to interfere and help them or to deliver them from their dreadful work.”

• 1 •

Saxant and Senss were not the only printers in the neighbourhood. In the town of Falshanger, less than three miles by arterial road from their printing press, was the huge plant belonging to Lyle, Lyle and Seeley, whose buildings covered many acres of land and who numbered their employees by the thousand. About seventy-five per cent of the small houses in the streets near their works, offices, and packing department were occupied by the workmen, and in many families the work was hereditary, for the press had been established in the town some eighty-seven years.

It had grown, particularly since the war, although its directors would have replied to enquirers that there seemed no particular reason why it should have done so. The fact of its growth was apparent, however, outwardly, in the various styles of its buildings, and, so far as its interior was concerned, in the fact that its original office building could

no longer accommodate more than about one-fifth of its office staff, some of whom were now lodged in a kind of glass-house partitioned off from a store-room on the ground floor, and the rest in a top-floor room above the packing department.

The great machines were working at full pressure. An ex-Cabinet Minister had decided to publish his reminiscences, and the fortunate publishers had already sold out two complete editions before publication.

Everyone at the printing works became excited when a big job was on hand, for the works had contrived, to an extraordinary extent, to preserve the homely atmosphere, with the directors as the fathers of their work-people, which had always been the keynote of the firm's policy with regard to its employees. The works had been a family business, employing fewer than a score of men in 1852, when the first Lyle had set up his printing press in Falshanger.

•2•

Jonathan Mabb cut himself a piece of cheese.

"Pickles with that?" said his mother.

"Indigestible," said he. "Got to go on at seven."

"Oh, Jon, I wish you didn't have to work a long shift! And isn't it your night for Flossie?"

"Bust with her Saturday."

"Oh, Jon! I thought there was something up."

"Not with me there isn't. Anyway, plenty of girls, and so I told her."

"Unkind to say it, Jon, even if it's true."

"Well, so long, Mother. Home with the milk, if I have luck."

"Seven o'clock, I thought you said. The milk comes at half-past five, dear."

"That's right. Knock off at seven."

"How many days you got to work the long shift, Jon?"

"Don't know yet. Don't believe anybody knows. This is one of the biggest jobs we've had for years, Mother. Old Green's autobiography. Two editions sold out before publication, and another two called for. Ten thousand copies, that first edition was. They say we may be printing half a million before we're through with it."

"Just fancy! Is it a nice book, Jon?"

"Don't know. Haven't read it. Half-inch you a copy if I can."

"Well, I think perhaps I *would* like to have a look at it, if it's going to be so famous. What Green is it?"

"Why, *the* Green, Mother. In the Cabinet he was. You must have read about him in the papers."

"No, I don't think so, dear. I'll think about it while you're gone. Green? Green?"

"Never mind. So long, Mother."

"Good-bye, dear. Now do mind, when you're getting tired, and don't go catching your fingers under that dreadful machine. I wish I'd never seen it, that I do. I know you'll chop your own head off, one of these days."

"But I couldn't, Mother. Nobody could. It's only got a five-inch clearance. You couldn't get your head under that."

"Well, you be careful, anyway."

"OK. I'll be all right. So long. I ought to be off."

His mother went to the door behind him, and watched him go down the street. The big printing works was only a short distance from his home.

Once Jonathan was in the next street he could see the works. Four storeys high they rose, great barracks with staring glass windows. He quickened his steps, although he did not know it. He loved the works. He had been employed at them (by them, he thought, for they were to him more of

a living entity than the human beings who spent, as he did, the greater part of their conscious existence there) ever since he had left school at the age of fourteen. He could not imagine existence without the works, and the paper-slicing guillotine at which he worked was his pride as well as his task-master.

The packing department, where he worked, was the nearest part of the printing works to his home. Its big iron gates had been newly painted green, the same colour as the five great doors, which opened on to the lading stage for the lorries. In front of the building, near the wall, which separated the grounds of the works from the street, was a great dump of coke for the boiler-rooms, which formed the basement of the packing department. A semicircular road, the private property of the company, ran from the iron gates by which Jonathan entered to the other similar gates near the canteen, so that the lorries had a one-way track.

The road also ran directly north from the iron gates, which formed the In entrance for the lorries, to printing rooms at the back, by which the girl employees always entered the building. This road passed the girls' bicycle shed and their canteen, which was separate from that of the men.

Jonathan went in by the first of the green doors. The lading stage was raised about five feet above the level of the road for convenience in loading the lorries, and was covered so that, whatever the weather, the loads need never get wet. This lading stage ran the whole length of that part of the building, a distance of at least sixty yards. Behind it and behind the sliding doors ran a corridor formed of half-glass, half-wooden screens. In this corridor books or printed papers could be stacked, awaiting loading.

Behind the corridor itself was the last of four large packing rooms, which were all very much alike, furnished, as they were, with vast stacks of paper, which cut up the room into corridors. There were also packers' benches and, in

addition, there were three guillotines, worked by electricity, each with its Board of Trade regulation safety catch.

Jonathan was one of the last to enter the building. He took off his jacket—he had no cap—and hung it up near his machine. Then he switched on the power, inspected the working of the machine, which someone else had handled during the past twelve hours, found everything in correct working order, and was very soon busy.

The work went on with a steady surge and swing. There was nothing feverish about it. It was like the rise and fall of great tides. Part of the time, Jonathan was slack. At other times, he was in the full noise and flow of labour, and at these times, if the full surrender of all his faculties to the demands of the moment could be called happiness, then he was happy. He was, at any rate, unconscious of any existence outside and beyond the pressing urgency of the apparently endless, careful, steady work.

But when another lull came he was conscious of a duty, which would fall to him later on. This was to tell Bert Mason what he thought of him. Chewing-gum had been parked on the outside of one of the uprights of the guillotine. Jonathan had cleaned it off, as well as he could, during temporary slackenings in the spate, but the thought that anybody should use his guillotine as a parking place for gum angered and affronted him. It was not like Bert, either, although Bert did chew gum.

The first break came at midnight, after five long hours. It lasted until a quarter to one. At the first sound of the bell—the packing department did not use a buzzer—a man near Jonathan dropped the bale he had just picked up and wiped his mouth. A couple of lorry drivers put their heads inside the door. Jonathan sheared through his last pile, the guillotine slicing the closely packed paper like a keen knife going through butter, stopped his machine, and put the safety catch on. Men by the dozen—by the hundred, a stranger might have thought—materialised from the other

packing rooms, pulling on caps and buttoning coats, tying scarves round their throats, talking, jostling, and making their way to the canteen for the forty-five minutes' break, an interval which would not seem very long.

The last man, an elderly fellow, another guillotine minder, left the department. The head of the department gave a last glance round and then crossed to the lift, which would take him up to the floor where the office was. Here he would make himself his private and particular cup of cocoa from his own store, guarded and, from time to time, replenished for him by his sister, who was one of the office staff. As he entered the lift the watchman walked into the department for a cursory inspection of its emptiness.

The atmosphere was hot and incredibly dusty. Particles of paper, minute paper dust, dust from men's boots and out of their clothing, microscopic fragments of bookbinders' cloth all floated in the air, making a kind of fog. It was misty outside, too. The cloudy wisps floated in through the open door, and added to the dimness of the vast room. The caretaker coughed and blew his nose. He walked about a bit, then went to one of the sliding doors, which the last man had pulled to behind him, and pushed it open. At the same moment he thought he heard a scuffling sound near one of the great bales in the centre of the floor. He walked that way, peered and poked a bit, said aloud, "Rats, I suppose," and went off to his little cubby hole to get his stick. He came back with it and poked and prodded, but could not start a rat, so he walked slowly out of the room to make his rounds.

His rounds began with the four packing rooms, the passage joining the last (or innermost) two, and two dark store-rooms, which had small windows on to a side-street. One of these rooms had been suspected, once, of being the hiding-place of a petty pilferer who had got away with a quantity of bookbinders' cloth and some four-colour prints of a book jacket—scarcely a big enough haul to have been

worth the risk, the directors thought, of being discovered on enclosed premises. However, the thief had *not* been discovered, and the firm, beyond informing the police, had done nothing in the matter, presuming the thief to have been a mischievous boy.

It had taken the watchman about ten minutes to make this part of his round, and he was going on into the four-colour room, which happened to be close at hand and where a friend of his had promised to leave him a copy of the evening paper, when he was aware of a slight sound coming from the direction of the store-rooms he had just left.

He was a bovine man, employed for that very reason, for he had no nerves, a fact which, in a large building whose ramifications extended over more than five acres of ground, was usually an asset, particularly as in normal times he was alone in it for five hours. His *raison d'être* was to see that tramps, on their way to London or Southampton, did not make the premises their temporary dormitory, for it was very easy to get into the works without being seen. Nobody more dangerous or undesirable than these poor roadsters was thought of by the watchman's employers.

The watchman's first reaction, therefore, upon hearing any kind of noise for which he could not account, was not to give chase, but to listen.

"Look silly, rushing about the place for nothing," was his subsequent expression and excuse. The sound he had heard was not repeated, so he walked ponderously towards the place of its origin, opened the store-room door, and was met by an eddying burst of misty air, which the open door had set in motion.

"Ho! So somebody have been in," he said, as he walked to the open window and peered out. "Now, where be they gone? That's what I'd like to know."

He shut the window and then looked at the catch.

"Funny! I seem to remember that window was *shut* when I looked at it just now. Somebody gone *out*, then, not

come in," he observed, still speaking aloud.

He tested the catch, shook his head, inspected the second store-room for the second time, found nothing, and then went back to the four-colour printing-room to get the evening paper. It lay on the rack of the big machine in the centre of the room, carelessly tossed there by the man who had read it. It was open at the racing news. The watchman turned the pages until they were in their right order, folded the paper carefully, glanced at the heading on the first page, put the paper into his jacket pocket, and walked back to his cubby hole.

Jonathan had gone out with the others to get some food. On long shifts the firm provided refreshment—cocoa and a cheese roll—free of charge. Coffee was to be had, and cost three halfpence, ham rolls were threepence, and there were cakes, large, various, and of a nature which might have taxed the digestion of an ostrich, at a penny each.

Jonathan, who, like most of the men, usually took the free food and drink, this time did nothing of the kind. He had heard a very faint but familiar whistle from the other side of the wall, and, dropping his companions, he had gone to a wooden gate, opened it, and slipped out. Flossie, his girl, was there, penitent and explanatory, and the young man could do no less than listen. She kept him there until he said that he must return to his guillotine.

About a dozen men had gone in before him. The watchman, hearing them come, had ambled as far as the inner door and then returned to his hutch outside the first packing room and continued to read the paper.

Suddenly there was a loud, crude oath, and Jonathan appeared from behind his machine, red-faced and in need of appeasement. In his own he held a severed hand, the blood still fresh about the clean-cut sinew and bone.

"What—done this?" he roared. "Messing up my machine with his—"

The men in the room stood and stared, except for a youth of seventeen, who was nearest the guillotine. He took a look at the hand, gulped, bolted for the door, and was sick on the platform outside. Jonathan seized a swab to clean blood from the guillotine, but an older man came up and caught his arm.

"Best touch nothing, mate," he said. "Board of Trade Inspector's job, this is. Wonder where the poor chap is as copped it?"

"Can't be one of our chaps," said another. "Everybody at the canteen."

"Another department. Someone fooling. Got what he asked for," said a third. They had gathered about Jonathan. He, sobered a little, was still holding the hand as though he did not know what he ought to do with it. The watchman had come up and joined them, and the other men were coming in from the canteen. The gradual influx of mist, brought in by everyone who entered by the outside door, was making the air quite dense and lent extraordinary unreality to the atmosphere.

Just then the head of the department came in, and the bell sounded for work to recommence.

"Better report it," said the man who had prevented Jonathan from cleaning his machine. "Here's Mr. Capet."

"Doctor on the job?" asked another.

"Bound to be, with so many of us at work," said a third. "He's under contract." The head of the department came up.

"What's the matter here? Anything happened?" he enquired. He was a big young man, nephew to one of the directors. He worked hard and the men liked him.

"Yes, sir. Accident. Somebody's hand," said Jonathan, holding it out distastefully, and glancing again at the mess on his machine.

"Good God!" said young Mr. Capet. "However did that happen? Where's the poor fellow now?"

"Don't know, sir. Not one of our men, I fancy," said a foreman packer.

"But when did it happen? Cartwright?—" The watchman came forward. "Anything to report?"

"Well, yes, and no, sir. I heard a rat, as I thought, in that there centre stack of paper, but when I poked there wasn't no rat, sir, so I goes me rounds. Me rounds takes me, as usual, past A and B store-rooms, sir, which I examines, there being nothing untoward in either. I then continues me rounds, being near the four-colour print-room, when I hears suspicious sounds. Upon returning to the aforesaid A and B store-rooms, sir, I am aweer that the window of B store-room is wide open. I makes an investigation, and dedooes that as the window was previous shut and fastened, somebody had gone *hout*, sir, not come in."

"You didn't hear anybody yell out anything, then, while the men were at the canteen?"

"That's all, sir. I heard nothing further."

"Very good. I'll ring the doctor. Mabb, you'll have to stand by for a bit until I get the doctor's report of the accident. May mean your cutter will have to stand idle until the inspector has seen it."

Jonathan stood by his guillotine until the doctor appeared. He had laid the hand on a ledge behind his machine, and produced it for the doctor's inspection.

"Yes, but—" The doctor carried the hand away. A quarter of an hour later young Leslie Capet came back.

"You can clean down your machine and carry on Mabb," he said. "Somebody being funny at our expense, although heaven knows why. That hand was cut off a corpse."

"Something else first!" said Mabb, resentfully. He left the machine as it was, and bolted for the store-room where the watchman had found the open window. He opened it, looked out, up and down the dim little street outside. Then, following what he supposed to be the example of the grim practical joker, he climbed out and dropped to the ground.

The works was not fenced off from the little street. Its own high wall formed the barrier.

•3•

The ears delivered at Mrs. Saxant's house and the hand left at Lyle's printing works provided the newspapers with a column or two and the police with a good deal of extra work. The police adopted the reasonable theory that the ears and the hand were from the same corpse, and on this opinion they based their investigations.

The hand, it appeared (according to the newspapers, who were not quite as reticent about the case as the chief constable could have wished), seemed a more readily workable clue at first than the ears, and a thorough search had been made of the packing department at Lyle's printing works. It was not at all clear, however, how the intruder had gained access to the guillotine in order to cut the hand off the corpse, nor what his object could have been in performing this apparently unnecessary act. It seemed most unlikely that one man, working alone, could have transported the corpse to the packing department without being seen, and the police at first suspected that there must have been an accomplice.

A great deal of dull but essential routine questioning and checking went on, until every one of the firm's employees had been interrogated and asked to find an alibi. The police were most anxious, however, to discover and identify the corpse from which the hand had been cut.

The general public were apt with an explanation. Among local people the identity of the body was a foregone conclusion.

“Find the rest of Mr. Carn,” said the public bar of the “Lion,” several evenings running, “and you’ve gone halfway to solving all the mystery.”

The comparatively straightforward killing of Mrs. Carn, in fact, lost interest for the public immediately the newspapers disclosed to them the affair of the hand and the ears.

The locality was avid for more excitement, but this, for the moment, was not forthcoming. Little boys, remembering a previous newspaper case, fished the local waterways indefatigably in the hopes, or fears, of discovering other portions of the body, but they were unsuccessful. Their elders, half-grown youths and maidens, made up Saturday afternoon and Sunday parties of hikers and cyclists, to search commons, woods, and hollows in the hills for the corpse or its component parts, but, beyond the no doubt valuable amount of fresh air and exercise which they obtained, their efforts were as fruitless as those of the boys who went fishing.

Meanwhile, nothing whatever was heard of Mr. Carn, and all efforts to trace his movements after about three o’clock on the day of his wife’s death failed.

Carey Lestrangle and Justus Bassin still pursued their own line of enquiry, regardless (except for such information as they could glean from newspapers) of the activities of the police. One evening—both having taken up their quarters at the “Lion”—they were seated in the lounge in front of two pints of the excellent draught beer for which the house was renowned, when they were surprised and pleased to receive a message from the maidservant who helped with the service in the lounge that a young fellow was outside, and would be glad to speak to them.

He was a good-looking young workman, and his first enquiry was for the solicitor in charge of Mr. Carn’s affairs.

“Me,” said Bassin. “What is it?”

"It was my guillotine they cut the hand off with. My name's Mabb. I work at Lyle's."

"Let's all go into the private bar," said Carey. "We can get a table in the corner, and talk this over. Come on, Mabb."

The young guillotine-minder was able to give them a much more complete story than they had obtained from the newspaper report. He was obliging enough to draw on the back of an envelope, produced by Carey, a rough plan of the packing department.

"You know, Aunt Adela certainly ought to see this," Carey said. "Apart from anything else, it's significant that the gate-crasher knew his ground. Look at this, Bassin."

He traced delicately and invisibly with the point of a pair of dividers the line of approach to the guillotine, which it seemed that the intruder must have followed.

"You see? He came in through the packing-department door from this verandah, as large as life, and, having done the deed, sloped through the store-room window just as the watchman thought. But—what about your guillotine, Mabb? Could anybody just set it in motion like that? Was the power still on?"

"Oh, yes. We don't do anything but switch off, like you'd switch off electric lights, when we goes off like that to the canteen. The power was on, all right. Kept on the twenty-four hours, it is, when we've got a rush job, you see."

"I see. But there, again, the man knew that. I suppose it couldn't have been one of your own chaps, Mabb, having a rather beastly joke? Somebody got a grudge against you, and thought he'd foul your machine and perhaps have it put out of action for a time?"

"I couldn't say, but I don't reckon it was one of our chaps. I haven't had a difference of opinion, not to signify, like, for eighteen months or more, and none of our chaps, as I knows on, bears me a grudge. Besides, we gets good pay and good overtime at Lyle's, and the fellow, if he was

caught, would get the sack. Too much to risk, I reckon, for a joke. Besides, I don't know of anyone as 'ud do it."

"No. I agree. I think, you know, Bassin," he added, turning to the solicitor as the young workman applied himself with some concentration to his beer, "that the watchman probably disturbed our intruder and caused him to make off quickly and leave the hand lying. Otherwise I fancy that he would have taken the hand away with him, and posted it, as he did the ears."

"I don't know about that," said Bassin. "It would have taken no longer to pick up the hand. It didn't fall to the floor, you see. It rested on the guillotine ledge. What I want to find out is how on earth he managed to carry the corpse to the packing department. I mean, it's easy enough to see how he got in and out; it's quite certain that the guillotine was used to cut off the hand; yet the police can get no further because they can't find a single witness who saw anybody carrying any suspicious-looking or even any fairly bulky package."

"I reckon," said Jonathan Mabb, wiping froth from his upper lip, "as the chap didn't carry the whole of the corpse; leastways, not into the packing-room. Look here: suppose he has the body hid somewhere; what prevents him hacking off, say, the whole arm—quite simple and easy to carry—wrap it up with a piece of sacking round the handle of a spade and carry the two together—nobody in this here town would ever notice that, either day or night—"

"By heck, he's got it, Bassin!" said Carey. "Just the arm, and not the whole corpse at all. It would entirely simplify the thing. I wonder whether the police have thought of that?"

"They hadn't, but they have now," said Mabb.

"You mean you suggested it to them?"

"I did that. Likewise how the corpse itself could have been brought to our works or took away. It would only have to be shoved in the back of one of our vans. Hide it in the coke-heap outside the canteen door up there by the street

wall, wait till the vans was lined up and discharging their stuff (or loading up, it wouldn't signify which), shove it in the back van—none of the chaps would ever see it—too much in a hurry—when Lyle's gets stuff off, they gets it off—and when the van drove away, there would be the corpse. I reckon you'll find it in Liverpool, where our American stuff goes. If the chap had bunged it inside one of the cases, it might be in America by now."

"And have you told the police this?"

"Course I have. What do you take me for?"

"Well, not for Mr. Carn's murderer."

"You got it!" said the young man, with a suddenness and intensity, which made his hearers jump. "I've told the police what I think, and I've told 'em what I done, and I'm willing to bet it's two hundred to one they pull me in. Gave me the hint I knowed a damn sight too much for an innocent man. So I asked Mr. Capet—decent sort he is—what I better do, and he said see a lawyer.

"Well, I don't know no lawyers, and them in Falshanger don't experience murders, that I know of, so Mr. Capet, he says there's a lawyer from London looking into things for Mr. Carn, and why don't I look you out and get you to tell me where I stand?"

"You called at the House by the Brook, I suppose and Mr. Carn's brother sent you on here?"

"That's right."

"What have they got against you, Mabb, except that it was your guillotine which was used?"

"Plenty. Mr. Carn and me had a turn-up once or twice about the cricket team. 'Twasn't nothing, but seems they've raked it all up out of the chaps. Then I jumped out of the storeroom window to see where the chap could have hopped it and somebody saw me and got the times mixed up. Then, worst of all, I reckon, thinking it over, and my mother, she reckons so, too, is me slipping out the gate to talk to Flossie, just the time the chap come in and done it."

"Can't Flossie swear you were with her?"

"Ah, she do. Like a good 'un. But I reckon they don't believe her, and there's nobody else don't know. They'll find the corpse soon, too, I bet. I told 'em too much, I reckon, but I never had a grudge, that I'll swear, and I liked Mrs. Carn, and I reckon, like everybody reckons, police and all, that them ears and hand came off her husband's corpse."

"You knew Mrs. Carn?" said Carey.

"Ah, I did. If you want to know, she was my Sunday-school teacher and when we fell on bad times at home she helped us out and, later on, she got me the job at Lyle's."

"And you're sure it wasn't you?" said Bassin. The young workman replied with a strong negative expletive, finished his beer, and rose.

"I'll think over what you've told me, and I'll let you know in a day or two whether I can act for you," said Bassin. "You see, if Mr. Carn really has been murdered—well, he's our client, and—"

"OK," said young Mabb roughly. He pushed his way out without bidding them good night.

"He never done it," said Carey, looking at the door, which was still swinging.

"I rather hoped for some information which has not got into the newspapers and for which it would be hopeless to apply to the police. I'm waiting, as a matter of fact, for the next move in the game, because I don't think things are going to stand still yet," said Bassin.

"No. They don't make sense at present, and won't, until the police find the body, and dig up some motive for the crimes."

"They've still got a theory that Carn killed his wife, you know."

"Rubbish. What about that little girl of yours who didn't recognise the man with the cash-box?"

"I know we've agreed to go on the assumption that there's been a double murder, and that Carn himself has

been the victim of the second one, but the ears and the hand have not been identified as his, and never will be until the police can find the body they came from."

"I agree. But there's no real reason to suspect that Carn killed his wife, and plenty of reason to suppose that someone else did to get possession of the proofs and the letters."

"How are Saxant and Senss getting on with the book, I wonder?"

"Don't change the subject."

"I'm not changing it. I have an idea that the fun will begin all over again when those hundred copies are ready. One thing I've done is to get a list from Saxant of the people they were to be sent to. The book is for subscribers only, you see, and not for a general market, which is particularly helpful in a case like this. Here's the list. I'm going to bed now. Study it at your leisure and see whether it gives you any ideas."

"You think, then, that on this list is the murderer's name?"

"I don't think that, necessarily," said young Mr. Bassin with professional reticence. "But I do think that perhaps there's a pointer there, if only we could find it."

"Meaning to say that, up to date, you haven't been able to find it?"

"No, I can't find it at present. It's not even as though any of them are Jews."

"And all of them," said Carey, casting an eye down the list, "are well-known professional people, in any case, people that you *couldn't* connect with hands and ear and things."

"I know. Well, read it over carefully, and if you get any bright idea, we can compare notes tomorrow. You can take a copy, if you like."

He got up from the deep settee, and walked towards the stairs. He began to mount them, pausing for a second at the

dog's-leg bend to wave his hand.

Carey sighed, scanned the list, took out a small scribbling-pad, and began to copy from the list the names and addresses of the famous.

• CHAPTER 4 •

Private Investigation

"Then a dead silence fell on all the knights, and each man anxiously beheld his neighbor."

•1•

"What we also want," said Carey to Bassin next morning, "is a copy of the police list of people who are not employed by Lyle's, but who've been over the works recently."

"I know. Tried to dig it out of them, but nothing doing."

"Oh, well, if they won't give it to you, I don't suppose they'll let me have it, so we must get at it some other ways. I have the glimmering of today's bright thought. By lunchtime I may have enticed it out of its hole. If I have, I'll share it with you."

"Do," said Bassin. "I'm going to spend another morning with the proofs."

The two young men parted, thereupon, Bassin to sit under an apple tree (the proofs supported on a small iron table), in the pleasant and well-tended garden of the inn, Carey to go out, disreputably clothed as usual, in search of what he himself termed, in quotation, "a spot of art."

He had hired an ancient motor cycle combination, and in the sidecar of this he placed his gear. He drove off noisily

through the village, round the bend by the horse-trough, and so to the printing works of Saxant and Senss.

The works was a small, detached house at the end of a very narrow alley, and could not be seen from the street. Carey had to make enquiry before he discovered where it lay, and then, leaving his combination parked at the curb, he walked between a Methodist chapel and a doctor's surgery, past an Institute reading-room, up to a door at the top of two steps.

The brass on the door was shining, the paintwork was glossy and fresh and newly blistered by the sun, a small brass plate bore the names of the printers, and a card in the window at the side of the door was printed, in excellent type, with the words, *Enquiries: please ring.*

Carey rang, and the door was opened by a boy in shirtsleeves.

"Mr. Saxant?" said Carey.

"Never here until eleven," said the boy. He was not chewing gum, but managed to convey the impression that he was a confirmed gum-addict. Carey disliked him at sight. He enquired for Mr. Senss.

"He's in. Business?"

Carey, glancing down at his stained and spotted flannel trousers, decided that perhaps the boy had a certain amount of justification for regarding him as a seedy, suspicious customer.

"I've come from Mr. Bassin, Mr. Carn's solicitor," he said. The youth languidly strolled away, but, returning, stated that Mr. Senss was busy, and would see Mr. Bassin personally in an hour's time, if he would be good enough to come back.

So Carey, realising that Mr. Senss imagined that it was Bassin who had called, returned to fetch him from the "Lion" and to put into his mouth the questions he wanted asked.

"He'll see you. Upstairs, first left," the office boy stated to Bassin, jerking his head towards the inner door of the

room. Bassin walked towards it, opened it, and found himself confronted by a short passage and, at the end of it, a well-lighted flight of linoleum-covered stairs. He mounted these; found the door on the left. It bore out the youth's allegation that Mr. Senss would be found within by having the junior partner's name painted in white on the right-hand top panel. The spacing and lettering were pleasing to the eye, and Bassin examined the notification with some care. As he was about to tap on the door it was opened by a short, energetic, tousle-headed man in spectacles.

"Good morning," said Bassin, startled by this sudden apparition. The man demanded brusquely what he wanted.

"I'm Justus Bassin of the firm Bassin, Lillibud and Bassin, solicitors, of Old Seward Street, London, E.C.," Bassin replied, stifling a childish desire to click his heels, but adding with a grin, "Heil, Hitler" at the end of the sentence, a piece of bad manners—the War having not yet broken out—for which he reproached himself immediately.

"Ach!" said the tousle-haired one. "Berggheist!" He pushed past Bassin and clattered down the stairs as though he were wearing the boots of a Prussian guardsman. He had slammed the door behind him, and Bassin was again confronted by the lettering, in white paint, of Mr. Senss's name.

He tapped at the door, and a pleasant voice with a German accent invited him to come in.

"Ah, Mr. Bassin, I was so sorry to ask you to wait, but now I am at liberty again. And again this business. I think it is all so sad about poor Mrs. Carn, and the book, we think, at the bottom of it."

"Yes," said Bassin, "that's what I've come to see you about, once more."

"So? Sit down, Mr. Bassin. Please to take a cigarette." He whipped out an automatic lighter and lit a cigarette for Bassin and then one for himself, flicked the lighter shut, and put it back in his waistcoat pocket, all so quickly that there

seemed to be no interruption whatever of the conversation. "I think perhaps you have encountered Herr Bonner—pardon me—my stupid joke—did you not meet Herr Simplon on the stairs?"

"Oh, was that Herr Simplon? He seemed in a bit of a hurry."

"Only short-tempered, I think." He smiled. "He keeps an eye on me."

"Oh—a Nazi agent?"

"So. When I hear of proofs being snatched and of threatening letters, and of the disappearance of authors and the murder of their wives, I say to myself: 'Soon my turn. Herr Simplon has his eye on me here.'"

"A bit of a dangerous trade—printing, under the circumstances, isn't it?" Bassin enquired.

"Printing, my friend, has always come under the heading of dangerous trades, from the time of our great German inventor of the art, and your printer Caxton, until now. There are laws like mantraps for printers, now, as always; laws against libel and indecency and scurrility and—oh, many. And in Germany now no freedom to print at all. Even the poets and novelists must only write what the State believes is good."

"Yes. But I should have thought—"

"My dear boy, once a printer, always a printer. I print in Germany, and the Nazis do not like it, so I get out. I print here, and the Nazis still keep an eye on me, and one day, when I go a bit too far—like our last set of pamphlets—then I say to myself: 'Kurt Senss, have you money for your funeral expenses, because soon, very soon now, Herr Simplon is going to see that you do not print any more.'"

"I see," said Bassin. "Mr. Senss, what I still want to know is this: Why should anybody want to steal those proofs? What was there different about them from the uncorrected set which you gave me? I've read them and reread them,

and I can't see that the author *could* have had much to correct. What *had* he done on the stolen set?"

"My friend, I believe very little. I cannot remember, of course, but I can provide you, Mr. Bassin, with a copy of the printed book now very soon. Then you can make comparison. But I do not think your theory can be quite right, somehow."

"No," said Bassin. "I see your point, of course. Not much point in stealing one copy of the corrected proofs as long as the printers had another and were proposing to issue a hundred copies of the book. It's certainly a snag. Still, thanks very much. I'll remember, then, that I can count upon getting a copy of the book when it's printed."

"Next week, I hope. I shall remember. I will, in fact, make a little note."

He opened a large morocco-covered desk-pad, and wrote, in German, a memorandum.

"There is nothing else I can do this morning for you, Mr. Bassin?" he said.

"Well, I don't think so. What we're trying to get hold of is a list of visitors to Lyle's printing works at Falshanger, but I can hardly expect you to be able to supply that."

"No," he smiled. "I have been over their works myself, and so has my partner, Mr. Saxant. Mr. and Mrs. Carn have both been over them, I know, and two members of the English Royal Family were shown the works about a year ago. They have a very fine plant there. They have machines there better than anything I ever saw in Germany even. They have a rotary machine that is—what do you say?—the last word in cleverness, and their four-colour printing plant is very interesting indeed. You should apply for permission to be taken over the works. It has to be obtained specially—they do not have Tom and Dick go—but to you they would give permission, I do not doubt. Have you ever seen a hand-press?"

Bassin said that he had not.

"Then I will give myself pleasure to show you ours. You have time? Good. So have I. We make much pretence to be busy, but in reality"—he shrugged and laughed—"we are lazy the most of the time until the autumn."

"There's just one thing," said Bassin, when he had inspected and praised the press and the beautiful type founts, "if I may ask—"

"But of course. What is it?"

"Well, this book you were doing for Carn. These hundred copies..."

"Yes. Not a good book. Not a good bargain for us. But we have to print some things we do not like to print, otherwise we cannot live. We should not print such a book of ourselves, let us say, but when we have an order—"

"Yes, I quite appreciate all that. But, even so, you wouldn't, under any circumstances, print a harmful book, would you?"

"You have something on your mind, my friend. Tell me."

"Yes, I'll tell you. It seems odd to me that you, who left Germany because you couldn't stand the Nazis, should consent to print such a book as Carn's."

"What is the connection, my dear sir?"

"All this anti-Semitic stuff of Carn's. It's a bit thick, isn't it? It reads like one of the Nazi anti-Jew outpourings."

"It does, yes. What is that to me, though? I agree it was a bad book, but to us merely—how do you say? A job."

"You don't mind printing anti-Semitic books, then?"

"No. Why should I? I do not love the Jews. One does not need to be a Nazi to be an anti-Semite, my good friend. I think one of the few things good in Germany was to turn out the Jews and make it hot."

"Oh, I see. Yes. Thanks very much. That's made it all quite clear. I suppose I thought that all the people who didn't like the Nazis would naturally stick together. I hadn't realised—yes, I quite see your point."

"I hope so—and I hope not. It is not creditable, that I have a dislike for the Jews. Some are good people—of the best, one should agree. But I was unlucky, perhaps, and am sweated of bad Jews—Russian Jews—when I am a young boy. I am consumptive because of my treatment. It is not reasonable I dislike all Jews because of it, but it is, perhaps you agree with me, human, is it not?"

"It sounds reasonable, certainly," said Bassin, a little awkwardly. "Well, it's awfully good of you to have let me take up your time, Mr. Senss. I suppose—" He hesitated, and then made up his mind. "I suppose you couldn't let me have the other corrected proof—the one that Carn returned to you to work from, could you?"

The printer shook his head.

"It is all over the place, in bits," he declared. "Also, we need it too badly to spare it just at present. I am so very sorry. Next week, however, the book itself for you, isn't it?"

"That's it. Well, thanks very much for having put up with me and my questions. I do hope I haven't wasted your time."

"You are welcome, Mr. Bassin, very welcome. I shall do little until Mr. Saxant arrives. Then we shall talk a little, and then go out to lunch. It is a pleasant life. A very pleasant, easy life, and I wish it long to continue. Good-bye. I will see you out. No, it is not any trouble."

He stood in the open doorway whilst Bassin walked down the alley towards the road. Carey had parked the motor cycle combination further along the street, and was not in sight. Bassin walked with his long stride between the buildings, which shut in the path and, at half-way, looked back, but Senss was gone and the door was shut. The office boy, also, had returned to his slothful ease and to his chewing gum.

"Well, what news?" asked Carey.

"Tell you when we get back. Can't dig the corrected proofs out of them. Gathered that it was a bit of faux pas to

ask for them. Could hardly expect them to part up, I suppose, when, presumably, they're still working on them."

Carey trod on the self-starter, which sometimes acted, and did so on this occasion, and the two young men roared back to the "Lion."

•2•

In the afternoon, Carey went off again on some jaunt of his own, and Bassin, at a loose end, pored over the proofs in a vain attempt to read more into them than he had managed to do before. They were, of course, not only uncorrected by the author, but an altogether unmarked set. That is to say, even errors, which the printer's reader had discovered were not indicated on them... As he had already discovered, there were the usual printer's errors in punctuation, occasional bad spacing, letters upside down, the letter "i" left out of a word, or words out of alignment. The only error which was unusual, he thought (although he had insufficient experience of printers' proofs to know whether he were right in thinking this), was that not in one, but in two places the letter "d" had been substituted for the letter "b." He noticed it particularly because in one place it came in a line of the song "Tom Bowling" which ran, on the proof, "Here a sheer hulk lies poor Tom *d*owling," and could not think why he had not noticed it at his first reading. Then he dimly remembered that as a little boy, when he had first learned to read, he had had some difficulty in distinguishing the two letters. The fact that the name began with the other slight error of a small instead of a capital letter had probably contributed to this oversight. The German word *Donner*, spelt *Bonner* on the proof, he had noticed at once, probably because of the capitals.

He could detect no particular significance in these errors, but determined to point them out to Carey at lunch-time.

He had reached this decision when Carey himself came bucketing into the yard with his motor cycle combination, parked it and, swinging a pair of motoring gloves as disreputable as the rest of his outfit, walked through the wicket gate, up the centre path, and over the lawn to speak to him.

"I've got a few of them," he said, looking up, "but it doesn't help, I'm afraid."

"A few of what?" asked Carey.

"People who have been over Lyle's printing works within the past year."

"Oh, good. How many names?"

Bassin gave him the names, and proposed that they should interview the people.

"Counting or not counting the Royal Family?"

"Oh, not," said Bassin seriously.

"Well, that leaves four, then. The Carns, both of them, Saxant, and Senss."

"Doesn't get us far, but perhaps far enough. Lend me that contraption of yours, will you?"

"Better still, I'll drive, and you can sit in the sidecar again. I'll sling my gear out."

He went back to the yard, followed by Bassin, who had been sitting at a small table in the garden, and whilst Bassin locked away the proofs in his bedroom, Carey stowed away his sketching materials and had brought the combination round to the front of the inn by the time Bassin was ready.

"What's the programme?"

"Lyle's works. I'll flourish our four names at them, and demand the rest. It *may* work, and it may not."

"I've got a better idea than that. Ask to be allowed to verify the date of Carn's visit. They'll hand you the Visitors'

Book, sure as eggs, and you can take an eyeful of the other names.”

“Better still, I can put them down.”

The motor cycle woke up and began to roar like a lion again. Carey quietened it a little and then, with a spring and a long splutter, it shot off down the village street. He pulled its head round, and soon they were making forty miles an hour in the direction of Falshanger.

The scheme worked. To demand to see the names of all visitors to the printing works during the past year was inviting a refusal, but for Bassin, in his capacity as the legal representative of Carn, to ask permission to verify a date was a different matter. The book was produced by the works manager, who was called away almost as soon as he had given the precious and instructive volume into Bassin’s hands, and Bassin scribbled vigorously, but not for very long. The works had had few visitors. Permission was not readily given for people to be taken over the huge building with its many floors and blocks. Apart from a party of boys from the local grammar school and two masters, a party of girls with a mistress, and a dozen Scandinavian journalists, who had made a third party under the leadership of a certain Mr. Alexander McGunn, only three persons had been conducted over the works. Rapidly Bassin wrote their names and addresses. The latter were not written in full, except for one, that of a certain Margery Sawbone who lived at 31 Brant Street, W. The other two, a Mr. William Simplon and a Mr. Charles Leaf, were local people. Their full address could be obtained very easily, Bassin thought.

He waited for the manager to return, but he did not come, so Bassin closed the book, handed it in at the window of the office, which was next door to the manager’s room, sauntered down the steps and round to the side of the building. Here Carey, seated on the broad saddle of the motor cycle, was gazing earnestly at the green-painted doors of the packing shed, cut off from ground level by the

high verandah-platform at which the paper and printed material was unloaded from or loaded on to lorries.

"Hopeless," said Bassin, following his eye. "We've got to let the police do that end of it, I'm afraid. They've got the men and the experience and, of course, the authority, to get on the track of the corpse if loaded in lorry, as our friend Mr. Mabb suggests. Not a bad chap that."

"Did you get the names?" asked Carey.

"Yes I did. Let's get back with them, and I'll show you. Although they don't look much good to me."

"Not likely murderers?"

"Shouldn't think so. Still, two of them are local people, and both are males. I don't, somehow, see petticoat influence in all this."

"Neither do I," said Carey.

There was an interesting and unforeseen development, however, which, as Bassin said, might or might not be important. After they had returned to the inn, and had discussed the list of names, it was arranged between them that they should interview the people concerned, on some pretext, so that they could get an impression of what they were like.

"It won't be any sort of proof, of course," said Bassin, "but it would be better than doing nothing. My father doesn't particularly want me back in London, and I've told him there are one or two things I can do before I return. This will have to be one of them."

They tossed for choice of victims. Carey lost, so Bassin gave him the schoolmasters and schoolmistresses and he himself took the two local residents. He had shown Carey the two errors in substituting "b"s for "d"s in the proofs, but neither of them could see that there was any particular significance in the slips. Carey reminded him that Senss had promised him a copy when the book was printed, and then added thoughtfully:

"Yet that's a bit odd, too, you know?"

"Why? Oh—yes, I see. You mean that if the book is to be printed and circulated privately, there won't be a copy over? I suppose Senss didn't think of that. Printers generally print more copies than are going to the binders, I believe; I suppose to have a few in hand in case anything goes wrong. That may be the case here. They will only send out the hundred copies that Carn has ordered, but really they'll take off a few extra ones in case of accidents. Who's going to tackle the lady from West London, by the way? Me, I suppose, when I go up to Town to report to my father. Where is it, by the way? Do you happen to know?"

"Acton, or Hammersmith."

"Oh, I shall have to find out. All right, then, I'll do Miss or Mrs. Sawbone, although I'll wager a quid that she's as right as rain. What about Mr. McGunn?"

"Journalist. Better try Fleet Street. I've a pal on the *Epistle* who'll give me the dope about him if anybody can."

"Good. That settles all of 'em, then. Finished, or do you want some cheese?"

"I want some cheese. But don't wait."

"I won't, then. The bus goes in about four minutes from the horse-trough. Good-bye. Remember that the best way to dodge a flung flat-iron is to fall flat on your face, and let it soar over you into the middle distance."

"Same to you, with mud on it. Ta-ta."

Carey finished his lunch and then went to his room and changed his clothes, reappearing, to the gratification of the country girl who served in the lounge and occasionally helped to wait at table, in a suit of Bassin's plus fours and with his hair brushed. He did not use the motor cycle combination this time, but caught the bus for Falshanger and, after half an hour's ride on the front seat on top, he reached the post office.

He was quickly and easily directed to the Grammar School. It was an Edward VI foundation, and the town was proud of it. His business there was soon over. Not only was

he not permitted to interview either of the masters in question, but he did not succeed in gaining audience of the headmaster, either. The secretary told him firmly that an appointment was absolutely necessary, and asked him whether he wished to make one.

"No," he answered.

"Very good," the secretary replied, and he was left to find his own way out to the street. He felt, however, as though he were being watched. He went straight to the nearest post office, and telephoned the school, demanding to speak to the headmaster. This time he was successful, and managed to address a moving appeal to the Great Unseen, begging to be allowed to interview the two masters. He represented himself as a master from another school who was anxious to ascertain the educational advantages of taking boys round a printing works. To his surprise, this rather thin excuse was accepted, and he was informed politely that if he would present himself at the school at four o'clock, the two masters would be free, and, no doubt, would give him their views.

That left him time, he thought, to try his luck at the girls' school. This was about a penny bus ride away, he was informed by a courteous passer-by. He took the bus, found the school, rang the bell, and asked to see the head mistress.

She was out at a conference, so he asked next for Miss Platt, the mistress who had accompanied the party of girls. Miss Platt was paged by a tall girl in spectacles, and appeared in due course. The girls, she said, had enjoyed the visit, but had not received the clear impressions she had hoped for, because, she felt, they had been shown too much at one time. A series of visits would have been better. Nevertheless, it had been most enjoyable, and the directors had been most helpful and most courteous.

Carey mentally crossed Miss Platt off his list, and went back to the boys' school, where Mr. Smith and Mr. Waters,

two bonhomous young schoolmasters of the modern breed, received him with considerable heartiness, and apparently suffered no qualms of doubt at being required to accept him as a member of the brotherhood.

"It isn't you, it isn't you," muttered Carey, almost walking underneath a car. The driver pulled up sharply, and swore at him in German.

"Himmel!" replied Carey, and then apologised for not looking where he was going.

"Ach! Herr Bassin?" said the driver. He was the irascible little man whom Bassin had met that morning at the top of the stairs at Saxant's and Senss's press.

"Well, not Bassin in person," said Carey. He smiled pleasantly, waved his hand, and continued upon his way. Mr. Simplon scowled, and his little car leapt forward, spitting like an angry cat, and soon was out of sight.

Bassin, who arrived at the "Lion" by five, had a more interesting report to make to Carey than Carey was able to give him.

"The first man I went to see was this chap Simplon."

"Oh, yes. He nearly ran over me. You must have annoyed him, or something."

"Well, according to Senss, the chap is a Nazi agent. I imagine they are quite easy to annoy. Anyhow, when I mentioned Lyle's printing works, he foamed at the mouth and practically kicked me out."

"It doesn't strike you as odd, does it," said Carey, "that the first printer's error you hit on should have been the chap's real name? You remember you said that Senss referred to him as Bonner, and then altered it to Simplon?"

"Just coincidence, I should have thought. Of course, the German for thunder does change into Bonner if you substitute 'b' for 'd.'"

"But don't you see? Simplon is the name he is ordinarily known by in England. Bonner is his real name, and Senss knew him by it in Germany before they came over here."

"Sounds possible. So we could bear to keep an eye on Herr Bonner-Simplon, you think?"

"Ask me, he sounds like our man."

"Oh, come! You can't just leap to conclusions like that. We've still got the London end to ferret out, you know—Miss or Mrs. Sawbone and the journalist. Just one thing, though. There *is* some connection, somewhere, between these Germans and Carn. He uses several German words in his book. When he can't think of any more vile English names to call the Jews, he borrows a few German epithets and bungs them in."

"Well, what I wish is that the police would find Carn or his corpse. Or any corpse that would give us a bit of a lead. But old Donner-Bonner for me. I bet you that's the way the cat jumps."

• CHAPTER 5 •

The Corpse on the Coke-Heap

“Oh, Sir Lancelot, thou hast betrayed me; thou hast put me to death...”

“Within this place, as we are told... there is a shield no man may bear around his neck without receiving sore mischance or death within three days.”

•1•

Carey's desire for a corpse was soon to be satisfied. The police, pursuing (in an unspectacular and, in fact, laboured way) their own line, were brought, chiefly because of the suggestions voluntarily made by Jonathan Mabb before his arrest, to examine the movements of all lorries to and from Lyle's printing works on the night of the discovery of the hand.

Although it was still probable that the corpse had been transported thus, an examination itself proved fruitless. The police, then, merely as a matter of routine, proceeded to reexamine all possible hiding places near the works including the coke-heap outside the packing department.

That they had already shifted and then shifted back the ten tons of fuel which composed it, appeared to cause them no impatience, and Bassin, walking up the street on his

return one night from the last performance at one of the Falshanger cinemas, was amused to see them working by the light of lamps, earnestly engaged in shifting the coke again.

Carey had returned to Stanton St. John and the pigs, and Bassin had spent a loafing sort of day. He had telegraphed to his father, who told him that he could return to London if he liked, but that there was nothing much to do, and if he liked it in the country he might as well stay.

So he had decided to stay for another week, in case anything exciting happened, but his private opinion, which he confided to his father by letter, was that Carn had killed his wife and had contrived to disappear.

He stood by the railings, with a small gathering of other sightseers, and watched the police at work, but had to wait until the next day to know the sensational results of their researches. He did not even know, that night, that they had found anything, for all that any of the sightseers could bear witness to was that gradually the police disappeared one by one or two by two, or, at last, four at a time, inside the building, and the dark heaps of the coke, shelving steep and black in the sidelong illumination of the street lamp half a dozen yards away, was all that was left to look upon.

The body, as the sergeant unnecessarily pointed out, was in a partially decomposed condition. It had only one arm and was without its ears, a state which, the inspector averred, "the amount of *decomposition* noted couldn't hardly account for."

"Carn, all right, I reckon," he added, when the photographers and the doctor had done their respective jobs, and he was ready to make his report. The chief constable later concurred in this view, and it was supported by the younger Mr. Carn from the House by the Brook, who (retching horribly all the time, for the corpse was really extraordinarily unpleasant both to look at and to smell)

positively identified the body as that of his brother Fortinbras.

It was left to the doctor to provide the second and greater sensation. He asserted definitely, to the irritation of the British Sunday-reading public, that the arm and ears had certainly been removed after death and not before.

The police, of course, were prepared for this statement, as it had already been established that the hand found beside Jonathan Mabb's guillotine had been cut off a dead body.

Thorough to the last, however, the police continued to search for the missing arm, but did not find it. A curious and unsatisfactory inquest did nothing to clear up the mystery of the mutilated dead man, and Bassin decided that, if the firm's client were really dead, there was no longer any reason for him to remain in the neighbourhood.

Carey's suggestion that he might care to visit the pigfarm and meet his redoubtable aunt began to attract him, and he had already packed his bag when the morning paper, which he had strolled out to buy before breakfast, caused him to give a sudden exclamation, which made a passing dog, which was accustomed to be kicked, yelp, and dodge out of his way.

The extraordinary news—a scoop for the paper, obtained, it appeared, by a young reporter with a more than ordinary flair for a story, which was due to break—was that an anonymous letter had had the effect of getting the police to ask for an exhumation order. The armless corpse was to be examined again.

Later, the rest of the story came out. There had been no anonymous letter, but the inspector in charge of the case, a man by the name of Ellerton, had had the idea of once more examining the ears, which had been in the possession of the police since the evening of the day on which they had been received by Mrs. Saxant. As a consequence of this detailed examination the exhumation order had been applied for.

It was granted; Mr. Carn at the House by the Brook offered no objection but said that he couldn't, surely, be expected to look at the corpse a second time. He was informed that his presence at the exhumation would not be necessary, and the newspapers were able, very soon, to give their readers value for money and a welcome antidote to the usual Crisis news, by reporting officially that the body was that of a middle-aged man who had received a wound from a very thin stiletto through one of the ears, and that the ears must have been detached in the hope that the second wound might serve to disguise the first.

The weapon itself was also traced. Bassin himself could have told the police where it had come from (had not the younger Mr. Carn told them first), for he had noticed it in the room where Mrs. Carn had received him. He had a taste for, although little knowledge of, sixteenth-century weapons, and this jewelled pin—it was scarcely more—had taken his fancy immediately he saw it, although he, as immediately, had forgotten it once he was out of the house.

It was found trodden into the mud at the bottom of the duck-pond of the farm next to the House by the Brook, and it was not discovered by the police, but, naturally enough, by the little girl, who was paddling there, as usual. She wounded her foot on it, for, thin as it was, it had four cutting edges.

Her father boxed her ears when he saw the cut foot, told her mother to wash it and bind it up, and went out himself with a spade to dig up what he supposed was broken glass. When he found the stiletto he had no idea that it was what the police were in search of, but, after consulting with his wife, he took it to them because it “looked valuable and he didn't want trouble.” The hilt was set, rather flamboyantly, with semiprecious stones.

Following closely on the finding of this weapon had come the arrest of young Jonathan Mabb. Cautioned, he was reported by the Press to have said:

"I thought you'd pinch me for it. You won't get away with it, though."

Then he put his arm round his mother and said:

"I'm going quietly, Mother. Don't you fret. They got to do this, but it'll be all right. I never done it, and the law will have to say so. You'll see it'll be all right."

The inspector and his sergeant regarded mother and son with tolerance, and did not believe, themselves, that Mabb was guilty. Appearances, though (as the inspector argued later), were just sufficiently against him, and the circumstantial evidence hung together just sufficiently well to justify the arrest, although nobody, not even the chief constable, who had played cricket with Mabb occasionally, liked it very much.

It stifled Press criticism, however, for the newspapers—or, more fairly, a section of them—professed a dreadful horror of unapprehended murderers who sent ears by post and chopped off their victims' hands, it being urged that only monsters did these things. These newspapers then found the statistics of unsolved crimes, which were always kept handy as a goad for the police, and printed them with suitable references and mostly in italics, and when the chief constable or the inspector were teased or reproached later, on the score of Mabb's arrest, they had their excuses to hand.

Bassin, convinced of Mabb's innocence, went to see his mother, and also visited Flossie, the cause of some of the trouble. They were not helpful. Flossie told again the story of the quarrel and of her subsequent and, as it seemed, disastrous choice of a time to make it up, and the mother, poor soul, could do nothing but assert her boy's goodness and innocence.

The discovery of the body had given Bassin fresh interest in the case, and he was not at all surprised to receive a letter from Carey stating that the Fleet Street man whom Carey had promised to visit was obviously out of it.

He had interviewed him, and he was well known, reputable and, apart from the special visit to Lyle's with his conducted party, had never been to Falshanger or anywhere near it, in his life.

Although none of these statements appeared at the time to be proved, Bassin felt quite sure that they could be accepted as true. He was convinced that his own interview with the other London visitor to Lyle's works would produce exactly the same result, and was not considering it as a serious contribution to the unravelling of the mystery.

For the mystery, far from becoming clearer with the discovery of the body in the coke-heap, had become far more bewildering. Bassin, seated in the lounge at the "Lion," went over and over the more obviously difficult points. He even made notes and studied them, as:

1. I can believe that Carn murdered Mrs. Carn, but if he did, why should he steal the cash-box and the letters?

2. Why should he murder Mrs. Carn?

3. If Carn was the murderer, who was the man the kid by the duck-pond did not know, and who was carrying the cash-box. Could he be an accomplice? But does a man usually need an accomplice in order to murder an obviously unsuspecting woman in circumstances, which he himself is free to contrive?

4. If Carn were not the murderer, how was it that somebody else could take advantage of the few minutes that Mrs. Carn was absolutely alone—and when nobody could have anticipated that she would be absolutely alone?

5. (a) Were the anonymous letters really written by Carn to try to divert suspicion from himself? Or

- (b) were they genuine threats? If so, who wrote them?

(c) What was the idea of getting me down to the house when the cash-box could have been protected in other ways? (He had asked himself this question dozens of times, and the only answer that made sense was that Carn had plotted to kill his wife as soon as she had made the gesture of handing the cash-box over, again so that suspicion would be diverted from himself and directed towards the mysterious letter-writer.)

6. The weakness of the arguments against Carn is the lack of motive. There has appeared no reason why he should kill his wife. I might have a go, in a roundabout way, at that side of it, but the police are sure to have done so.

7. Even if Carn did kill his wife, and the letters and cash-box business were all so much eyewash, who then turned round and killed Carn?

8. On above, why should anyone kill Carn? The only obvious answer is that someone in the know didn't want the book published. But Carn had published plenty of brilliant, dirty stuff. Why boggle at this? Of course, it's anti-Semitic, but no individual Jew has cropped up in the business at all, so far. Besides, why murder a man who only intends for publication so small a number of copies? Again, does all this anti-Jew stuff really do much harm? Beastly, of course, but isn't it, in the end, a bit of a boomerang?

9. Why the fanciful touch of the hand and ears? Sounds more like Carn than anybody else, and yet it's Carn who is dead. Why Mrs. Saxant as recipient? Could she and Carn have been—

After the dash, which he put automatically, because he did not need to express, at any rate in note form, what it was that they could have been, he felt a certain amount of

satisfaction. The dash might, at any rate, point to a reason for the removal of Mrs. Carn. His father, he remembered, had never liked Carn, and that not from reasons of jealousy, although he was always convinced that Mrs. Carn had made a wrong choice. There was nothing in the fellow, Mr. Bassin senior had been wont to declare, except in his head.

No guts was the modern and more terse and non-equivocal rendering, as young Justus Bassin had appreciated.

And yet... From a deceptive and filmy school-boy memory, confused and flattered by the lavish hospitality of that solitary but splendid afternoon, young Bassin had often tried to reassemble a mental picture of Carn, and the result was always the same. He could imagine Carn the conceited, Carn the timorous, Carn the profligate, Carn in debt, gone mad, committing fraud, but he could not image Carn the suicide or Carn the murderer.

"Although, of course, that goes for absolutely nothing," he thought, "and is probably because he lushed me up with grub and cider and ices and all that sort of thing when I went to the garden fête. Lots of murderers have apparently been the kindest men until they commenced the careers that made them famous."

He went up to the little sitting-room of the inn, which was on the first floor next to the haunted bedroom. There he wrote a letter to Carey, informing him of the arrest of Jonathan Mabb and of his own complete belief in Mabb's innocence. The letter ended:

"And I feel completely bogged and rather fed up. Wish you were here. The place is a bit of a morgue without you. I suppose you couldn't come back and bring your Aunt Bradley?"

He strolled out to post his letter, continued his walk along the London road, turned off it along a lane bordered by elms, which led past the vicarage and then, by a narrow footpath, to the church, stood a moment, reflectively, beside

the churchyard wall, and suddenly saw a car go by on the other side of the churchyard.

Surprised, because he had had no idea that there was any road nearer than the lane that he had turned off to take the footpath, he dismissed the fact as of very little importance, since he preferred to take his long walks over the hills, avoiding roads even if it meant going miles farther round in order to be able to do so. He continued, by the footpath he was on, past the little girl's duck-pond and so to the House by the Brook.

Rose-coloured lights in the room in which Mrs. Carn had been killed showed that the new owners were, at any rate, not subject to vulgar fears nor particularly sensitive to atmosphere, and, had he not known perfectly well that the police had already made the fullest possible investigation into the movements of the younger Mr. Carn and his wife at the times of the two deaths (the time of Carn's death having been established approximately by the medical witnesses at the inquest), Bassin might have been tempted to suspect that the present owners of the fine old house and Carn's historic and valuable treasures knew more than they had said about the murders.

Such suspicions, however, in the light of the police investigations upon that very point, were, he knew, entirely out of place, so he walked on again, past the gates of the little white bridges and back to the school, the horse-trough, and the road.

At the horse-trough he hesitated, visited by one of those crazy notions which he realised it would be to his professional advantage always to ignore. The moon had risen, and beneath her benign yet indescribably sinister light, the waters of the horse-trough, greenish, sprinkled negligently with grains of corn which drinking centaurs had washed from their dark lips, and swaying gently (for no conceivable reason except that the earth, Bassin supposed,

was still rotating upon its axis), invited a wild yet furtive exploration.

Looking cautiously about him, and perceiving nobody, for closing time was still distant one full hour, he turned up the cuff of his jacket and groped in the oily-looking water.

It was a great deal deeper than it looked. Completely resolved upon idiocy, Bassin pushed his hand to the bottom. His reward for soaking his jacket sleeve past the elbow was almost sickeningly dramatic. Like the young Arthur, heir to King Uther Pendragon, drawing the sword from the stone, or, later, receiving Excalibur from the hand of the Lady of the Lake, Bassin drew, from the slimy depths of the horse-trough, and with the hideous certainty of occurrences in a nightmare, the handleless missing arm.

•2•

The police rather ungraciously refused to betray excitement over the arm.

“Oh, yes, sir, thank you. Rather thought she’d turn up about now,” was the most that the inspector could be induced to say. He did not even accuse Bassin of having been an accessory either before or after the fact, and the disgruntled young man returned to the inn and went to bed.

Next morning he breakfasted and then began another letter to Carey, tore it up upon deciding that Carey might as well write to him first, and then went into the garden with his notes, which he proposed to brood over and continue.

The discovery of the missing arm so far from Falshanger, where the hand had been removed from it, was not in itself of any particular interest or importance; but that it should have been got rid of so near Carn’s own house was, to say the least of it, odd.

Bassin, again sitting in the garden, which was a short-clipped lawn with flower-beds, a small arbour scrambled over by roses, trellis here and there, screening a vegetable garden, cucumber frames and a small greenhouse for tomatoes, received a second inspiration, like, yet not like, the one which had caused him to grope in the right place for the missing arm.

Suppose, he thought wildly, the dead man, identified as Carn, were not Carn at all!

Suppose Carn were a double murderer!

Suppose he were planning more murders!

Carn had been over the printing works.

Carn was big—yet probably not as big as he had appeared to a callow, sixteen-year-old schoolboy—blond and (Bassin almost sat through the seat of his deck-chair in excitement) bearded.

A beard *could* be a wonderful disguise. He remembered himself in amateur theatricals, and other young men of his acquaintance. They had performed a period piece written by one of their number—broad farce, certainly (a lot of it impromptu gagging on the third night), but the beards had made enough difference in the players for them not to be able to recognise one another.

A beard *was* a wonderful disguise. Add to it a partly decomposed corpse, a bad smell of corruption, the probably insufficient lighting of the town morgue—once a Baptist chapel, and deconsecrated to its present use in 1908 (when a new chapel had been erected at the expense of a wealthy grocer, a pious and charitable man)—and one had the complete setting for a case of mistaken identity.

He toyed lovingly with the idea that Carn might still be alive.

“Beard and all,” he reflected, going to call on the younger Mr. Carn and (probably illegally) challenge him on his recognition of the dead man as his brother.

He found the younger Carn in the garden. He relinquished, very unwillingly, Bassin thought, his earnest contemplation of a small rockery, for he was a keen amateur gardener, and suggested an adjournment to the house.

"Oh, no, really, sir," said Bassin. "I don't want to take up your time. It's merely—you'll appreciate that there's a certain amount of business still to clear up at our London office—I suppose, sir, you are absolutely positive that it *was* Mr. Carn's body you saw? You couldn't have been mistaken, I suppose?"

He was surprised to see a hunted, apprehensive look in Mr. Carn's eyes.

"Funny you should come and ask that," he said. "Fact is, funny thing's happened. Don't quite know how to take it. Letter, typed thing—but Fortinbras always typed his own letters on the most ghastly old machine—his wife did his books on a newer and better one—"

"A letter, sir?"

"Yes, cancelling the order for the book. Fortinbras's signature, but no date. Saxant got it this morning at his house, and drove straight over here to see me. Only just gone, as a matter of fact. Funny thing. Still, the identification was all right, you know. Can't make a mistake like that. Brother and so on, you know. Otherwise sounds as though you might be right. Though I must say," said Mr. Carn's heir, with a degree of candour which Bassin fully appreciated, "I'm relieved to heaven you can't be, or I should have to go back to Chelsea—the fifth floor back and fetch the coal from the basement—all that sort of thing, you know."

He looked round the garden wistfully, and sighed, then shrugged his shoulders and crouched beside the rock-garden as though he had forgotten that Bassin was there.

Bassin hesitated and fidgeted a minute, and then walked back to the "Lion." A new and more feverish excitement now gripped him. He took out his notes again.

Suppose Carn were innocent, after all?

Suppose he knew the identity of his wife's murderer, knew that the anonymous letters were genuine threats, and had faked his own death in order to put the killer off his trail?

Suppose the killer did not want the book published?

Suppose there were something in it awkward, even dangerous, for the killer?

Wouldn't the killer have forged Carn's signature on that typewritten letter to Saxant?

Yes, but, according to the younger Mr. Carn, the letter had been typed on Carn's own old machine.

Still, that point could be cleared up later. After all, if the killer could obtain access to Carn's typewriter, naturally he would have done so. In that case, the younger Mr. Carn was in the plot. More—he had been bribed by his brother to "identify" the body as Carn's own.

But—and this thought seemed to Bassin to explode his whole beautiful theory—the body which had been identified as that of Carn was, without doubt, the body of a murdered man; therefore, if the rest of the theory were correct, Carn was a murderer, after all, and a murderer from the rotten desire to save his own skin.

Bassin dismissed this view of Carn. It did not coincide with grateful schoolboy memories of his generous hospitality.

Yet the order for the book had been cancelled.

Of course, if Carn were alive, he could have cancelled the order himself, but supposing that he was a prisoner, he might have cancelled it under compulsion.

In that case, his enemies, whoever they were, and not Carn himself, might have provided the corpse, and forced Carn to ask his brother to identify it as his. If this were so, where could Carn be? Who could be holding him prisoner, and for what fell and horrible purpose?

All sorts of atrocity stories flowed into Bassin's mind. He turned his head towards the inn yard, for he had again chosen to sit in the garden, free from interruption, with his notes. Without realising it, he must have heard the inspector's footsteps on the gravel, for the hard-working and conscientious police officer had entered the garden by the little wicket gate, which admitted people from the inn yard, and was walking towards him.

"I thought I'd come and let you know, sir, as the late Mr. Carn's representative, that the printers have received an order to cancel the output of Mr. Carn's book," said the inspector comprehensibly but incorrectly.

"Oh, yes, thanks. I've just heard the same thing from the other Mr. Carn at the House by the Brook."

"Bit of a Bolshy, that one," said the inspector, relaxing from the official tone. "Been checking up on him from the London end. Red as a rag to a bull. Tub-thumper and a bit of an agitator, too. Did a month in the second division for supporting women's suffrage when he was a young man. Bit hard on him; he was only just nineteen. It's a gentlemanly age, sir, for some things."

"He seemed a nice enough chap," said Bassin. "I put him down for an artist, myself. He mentioned Chelsea, and so on."

"Quite so, sir. And about the arm. Very good of you to think of us, sir, especially so late at night. We've been working things out a bit further. We want to be fair to young Mabb, sir. It does seem just a bit queer, to our way of thinking, that he should have thrown it away just there. We haven't been able to trace any movements he made that night, beyond the evidence of the two women that saw him get out of the window."

"Evidence that'll be chewed up and absolutely washed out at the trial, thank goodness," said Bassin. The inspector looked slightly apologetic.

"We've done our best, sir. There's a motive—"

Bassin snorted and then laughed.

"The fact is," he said, "that none of you believe Mabb did it, and you're still continuing to dig out what you can. That's about right, isn't it? And the very first thing that comes up, finding this arm in this village, when you know it must have been in Falshanger that night, or the criminal couldn't have chopped the hand off it with Mabb's guillotine, doesn't fit the case against Mabb at all."

"He might have slipped it to somebody, sir, when he got out of the window."

"I *might* slip a cobra to my aunt, hoping it wouldn't bite her," responded Bassin. "Don't talk rot, Inspector. I know young workmen are fools, the risks they'll run to shield each other—bad as chaps at school—but you don't seriously intend to tell me that the police think..."

"All right, sir, all right, all right," replied the inspector, hastily and with intent to soothe.

"Come to that," said Bassin, continuing with some warmth, "why on earth don't you pull *me* in, as I believe the expression is, and make *me* come clear about finding the arm in the horse-trough? Surely the very least that your fatheaded lot believe is that I must have put it there, as I was able to fish it out so opportunely!"

"As a matter of fact, sir," said the inspector, with a rich, reminiscent grin, "there was a suggestion of that nature put forward, but Sergeant Withy—you know the sergeant, I think, sir?—said that you might have had the intelligence to *put* it there, sir, but that, if you had, you'd hardly have had the intelligence to *find* it there, sir, meaning, I take it, that for the person who put it there to find it there and bring it straight to the station would be a very subtle move, sir, looked at from some points of view."

"So the sergeant doesn't think me subtle, Inspector?"

"He would regard it as a doobious compliment, sir. He said you were an honest, straightforward young gentleman as would go a very long way in your profession one day. I

am only quoting the sergeant, sir," concluded the inspector, with the great enjoyment of one who is in possession of a ripe but secret joke.

Bassin offered him beer, thus changing the subject.

• CHAPTER 6 •

The Case of William Prynne

“‘Beware,’ said the first knight, ‘of Merlin, for he knoweth all things, by the devil’s craft.’”

The arrest of poor Jonathan Mabb had not come as a surprise to Carey. He had been expecting it, he said to his aunt, as soon as he heard that the corpse had been found in the coke-heap.

The police, with their usual resourcefulness in such matters, and with the assistance of the nationwide organisation at their command, he announced to Jenny, had traced the corpse’s adventures from the time of death (approximately given by the doctors who, approximately, agreed upon this time) to its discovery by (according to Bassin) a regular bloodhound of a sergeant, some three weeks after the disappearance of Carn.

It appeared that in Bassin’s view—“and he ought to know,” said Carey—there was a reasonable case against Mabb. It transpired, as Mabb himself admitted, that there had been trouble at the local cricket club—a comparatively democratic institution, which had had Carn as its president and slow bowler—and that Mabb, an outspoken and independent fellow, had had, as captain of the team, several arguments with the president over the order of batting, and the entertainment of visiting teams. These arguments, which had always resolved themselves into victories for Mabb, were insufficient to lend colour to the

theory that Mabb was Carn's murderer, still less that he was also the murderer of Mrs. Carn, but they acted as a pointer. The concealment of the body in the coke-heap, after the heap had already been searched by the police, indicated knowledge of the previous search; the use made of Mabb's own guillotine (although unprejudiced witnesses pointed out that it would have been more sensible to have used somebody else's) and the fact that the most likely person to have used it would be an employee in the packing department at Lyle's, also went against the young man.

But the most damning evidence was that supplied by the two women who had come forward, at the request of the police, in connection with the escape by way of the store-room window, which overlooked the street. Both, independently of one another, declared that the man who had climbed through the window was Mabb. They had not come forward immediately, they said, the one because she did not like to think that she was responsible for getting anybody into trouble, the other because she had been away for her summer holiday and had not heard that witnesses of the incident were wanted.

Mabb still made no denial (said Bassin, in his letter) of having climbed through the window. He merely challenged the two women's evidence as to the time. He had been so much annoyed, he said, at the thought that his guillotine had been used by a stranger—never mind what for!—that his first instinct had been to give chase. He had left the building by the window through which, according to the watchman, the wanted man had escaped, because it seemed the obvious way to take if the man were to be run down. The watchman confirmed all this, but, pressed to give the time at which he had told Mabb about the open window, he appeared to become confused, and the police declared that he was shielding his fellow workman.

The watchman was a slow-witted, slow-moving man who had received a severe reprimand from his employers

for having allowed a stranger to be on the premises at all, and he was anxious, not to shield Mabb, but simply to avoid giving his employers any further cause for finding fault with him.

Nobody who knew Mabb (Bassin concluded) believed that he had had anything to do with the matter, but the local police had been pretty well chivvied from headquarters, and were glad to have made an arrest. The trouble was that Mabb, having sneaked out to meet his girl, could not produce the shadow of an alibi, except her word, which the police could not be induced, in the circumstances, to accept, for the time when his fellows had been over at the canteen—the time during which the hand had been cut off the corpse.

Why a man of Mabb's type should decide, having murdered Carn, to cut off his ears and his hand, did not seem to concern the police. As the sergeant said at the time, "That there's up to the defence, that there is."

Carey, although not surprised by the arrest, was seriously perturbed. The police, he felt, must think that they had a good case. On the other hand, as he assured his aunt, the young man they had arrested was certainly innocent.

He rang up Bassin. It was the day after the finding of the arm, but Carey did not know of this yet.

"What have the police got to say about Mrs. Carn?" he enquired. Bassin, who had just said good-bye to the inspector, was informed upon this point.

"They're not going to bother with Mrs. Carn's death. They think they've got Mabb pretty tight over Carn himself, so they'll charge him with that alone. Don't want to queer their own pitch."

"Sounds like a dirty business."

"It isn't really. There's a case against Mabb all right, and he knows it, and, of course, it'll grow. The police won't rest until they've got more evidence. The only thing is, he didn't do it. Are you getting Mrs. Bradley on the job?"

"Sure I am. That is to say, she doesn't say she'll take it—not in so many words—but I know she's going to."

"Well, bring her as soon as you can. I've found the arm."

Upon this exciting news he rang off, grinning wickedly. He badly wanted Carey; even more his famous relative.

Carey went into the kitchen where Mrs. Ditch, who had remained his housekeeper even after the advent of Jenny, was preparing bacon pudding.

"Now, then, not too much fat," said Carey, as a preliminary to conversation.

"Bacon es as bacon grows," Mrs. Ditch oracularly replied. "And don't ee come messen yar, Mr. Carey, for heaven's sake don't ee, for I've been that put about this momen ee wouldn't credet."

"Why, what's up?"

"Tes that there Pumpken," said Mrs. Ditch, referring to what was, in actual fact, the vegetable of that name, but indicating it with a capital letter as the villain of the piece.

"Oh, what a curse," said her employer sympathetically. "But, listen, Mrs. Ditch. This'll cheer you up. You know the murders near Falshanger, where I was staying?"

"Ah, well I do. Detch reads it all to me out of the Sunday papers well I be washen up after Sunday breakfast."

"Yes, well, Mr. Bassin has found the arm."

"Fancy that, now! All by hes own self, too an' all! Well, I never ded!"

"Yes. In the horse-trough. You remember I mentioned the horse-trough, Mrs. Ditch. Very dirty and greenish, and deep?"

"I do call et to mind, now ee ses et. En there? Well, to think of that, now! Well, there, I never ded! But what gev him cause to look for et there, I wonder?"

"He has these flashes," said Carey airily. It was the burning question in his own mind. "A very gifted, remarkable chap. I say, not *a//* that sage!"

"I was maken bacon puddens when ee were in your cradle, Mr. Carey, and sage and onions is as right en bacon puddens as en checken," said Mrs. Ditch, reviving a perennial argument.

"But sage and onion stuffing *isn't* right in chicken, Mrs. Ditch. I'm always saying so. It's much too fearfully pungent."

"Ah, I knows ee never sees et en London, Mr. Carey," replied Mrs. Ditch soothingly. "Ee'll get et en duck there. But et spoils the duck, and dooent coencide, as Detch says, weth apple sauce. Well, not to *my* way of thenken. No, ee'll hardly get sage and onion weth checken anywhere else but yerabouts, so do ee make the most of et while ee gets et, es my advice. Checken be very pappy meat without a good flavouren."

So saying, the implacable woman powdered more of the dried herb between finger and thumb, cut up more onion into her bacon pudding, tied it in its cloth, and popped it into a saucepan of boiling water. Then she sat down on a Windsor chair and called for Our Walt.

Her son appeared with a corked earthenware vessel containing home-made sloe gin, and of this palatable and inspiriting beverage the three of them partook while Carey, at the request of Mrs. Ditch, repeated, for Our Walt's delectation, the report of Bassin's having found the arm.

"Then I suppose your auntie well be goen down there, like?" young Walt suggested. At that moment there was a tap at the kitchen door.

"Tes her. I knows her knock," said Our Walt, in great excitement, getting up, emptying his glass, and going to the door. "Do ee come en, mam. Tes *of* ee we be spoken, en et, our mam, just thes very menute."

Carey repeated Our Walt's suggestion, and added Bassin's very urgent plea, but Mrs. Bradley, grinning her alligator, anticipatory grin, merely nodded like a mandarin and asked whether there was any more news besides the

discovery of the arm. Thereupon a pleasant half-hour was enjoyed by all in discussing the murders and libelling the police.

The next day passed without any message from Bassin. Mrs. Bradley, Carey observed, showed no marked desire to leave the comfortable environs of the pig-farm and the society of Jenny and the baby in order to investigate a couple of murders in which, Carey justly agreed, she could not be expected to have any particular interest, but on the day following, Bassin rang up again.

"Can't get on much further by myself," was the burden of his message. "Wish your aunt could come. Can't you persuade her? What I am doing at present is getting the handwriting experts to have a look at this letter which Saxant and Senss have received, cancelling the order for the book. I put it to the police that it must have some connection with the murder, but it wouldn't fit their theory, and they won't even look on it as evidence. They say that Carn must have written the letter and posted it before his death. Then it went astray, and then got found and sent on."

"So that, before he died, he had made up his mind against publishing the thing?" said Carey.

"It isn't true, I'm sure. He may have sent the letter, but if he did, he can't be dead."

"No. Well, good luck to the experts."

The experts, unfortunately, could not agree upon their findings. One declared that the letter countermanding publication of the book indubitably bore Carn's signature and certainly had been done on his typewriter. The other, who had been equally busy with measurements and magnifying-glass, asserted that the signature was a clever forgery, and had never been inscribed by Carn. He agreed that Carn's typewriter had been used, and even to the most inexperienced eye there could be no doubt that such was the case, for there were marked idiosyncrasies on the

typewritten sheet which could be reproduced by anybody using that particular machine.

"Pity he didn't *write* the whole letter instead of typing it," said Carey. "Anyway, I think old Bassin deserves my support. Can I borrow your car, love? I suppose you won't come along?"

"Yes, I will, child," said Mrs. Bradley, tying a yellow-spotted veil over a small, bright green hat. "But George is to drive," she added firmly, seizing her nephew's sleeve in a steel grip as he attempted to climb into the driver's seat. George saluted, and got in after he had arranged his passengers. Jenny and the baby stood in the porch and waved. Carey yodelled in reply. Mrs. Bradley cackled, the baby began to cry, and a drove of young pigs, who decided to cross the unmade trackway by which the car was leaving the pig-farm, grunted and squealed in a mixture of fear and excitement. The car reached the gate. Carey got out and opened the gate, and George drove slowly through. The big car shaved the gateposts with mathematical exactness, the same small space being left each side between the posts and the wings.

"Pretty work," said Carey, getting in again, when he had shut the gate. "Right away, George!"

By tea-time they were at the "Lion" and Carey was ordering buttered buns. They had the lounge to themselves. It was a lovely afternoon, and such guests as the small inn boasted were seated at tables on the lawn. Bassin was not among them. To Carey's disappointment he had gone up to Town again.

"You know, child," said Mrs. Bradley, "there is something peculiarly retributive about this affair, somewhere. Have you read the case of William Prynne?"

"Oh, you mean the Puritan bloke in the reign of Charles I. The Scars of Laud, and all that?"

"Yes. Should you think that Jonathan Mabb has heard of Prynne?"

"Oh, very likely, I should say. He's been to school, you know."

"Yes. Prynne didn't lose his hand."

"No. Ears, though. And he was branded."

"Yes. Very few English murderers deliberately mutilate the corpse except for the purpose of delaying identification of their victim."

"You couldn't—"

"No. The hands and the ears—at any rate, in this case—appear to offer no special evidence for identification. Besides, no trouble was taken to hide either—rather the reverse, in fact. Therefore, what have we?"

"Presumably mutilation for mutilation's sake, or in other words, singular evidence that we are dealing with the type of mentality which is responsible for the horrors of concentration camps and so-called 'purges.' Well, what follows from that?"

"What does follow from it, child?"

"Well, it seems to lead on to the German element in the thing."

"I see your point, child."

"But would a German have heard of William Prynne?"

"Oh, yes, probably. They are, in some respects, a well-informed people. Besides, there is, in this case, a definite connection with the printing trade. Prynne was punished because he was a confirmed, incorrigible, obstinate pamphleteer. In the present case we get a man who was equally incorrigible and obstinate—this time a Jew-hater."

"Yes, but both the Germans concerned are also Jew-haters. Senss is an exile from Nazi Germany, but he hates the Jews as much as the Nazis do. He said so. But never mind. Have a bun. I wish old Bassin would come back. You'd get the dope better direct from him."

Mrs. Bradley, bright-eyed as a bird, took a bun in her thin, yellow hand and eyed it—it seemed dubiously—before

she ate it. Carey, who was in charge of the pot of China tea, refilled her cup.

"I shall be interested to see what you tackle first," he said. "How do you propose to begin?"

"I think we might attempt to obtain possession of a copy, or the corrected proof, of Mr. Carn's book, child."

"Yes. I suppose Saxant and Senss would hand over a copy if we asked for it officially, as it were."

"I do not imagine that they would, child. Anyhow, I do not propose to trouble them. Mr. Bassin, representing Mr. Carn's solicitors, is on firm ground in asking for a copy. We are not."

"But we could use Bassin's copy if they gave him one."

"Yes. If they gave him one, child. But it will be better not to wait. It may be as well, in fact, to steal one. They must all be printed by now. The best time would be tonight. Do you come with me, or do I go alone?"

"But—"

"Very well."

"I'll come, of course, but—"

"I know. You have your wife and child to consider," his aunt said solemnly.

Carey shouted with laughter, and the waitress came in to ask whether there was anything else they required.

"Yes," said Carey, "more tea. You win," he added to his aunt. "Tonight's the night, and I hope you get five years for breaking and entering. I shall say you incited me, and when they see me, in my pristine innocence, standing beside you in the dock—Yes, thanks, Ethel, just a little more milk."

At nine o'clock that night Mrs. Bradley ostensibly went to bed. At half-past ten Carey went upstairs to his room. At eleven both of them descended the back stairs of the house, made their way out by a door left open by Ethel for her fellow-servant, whose evening off it happened to be, and by midnight or just before they were creeping up the narrow alley between the Methodist chapel and the reading-room.

The policeman on his beat had just passed by. The town was in darkness. Carey led the way, his steel-muscled aunt in close attendance.

The door which opened into the enquiries office seemed an insuperable barrier. The window was closed and fastened. Carey was about to observe that their errand was doomed to fruitlessness when Mrs. Bradley electrified him by lifting the knocker and thundering on the door.

"What the—?" he said in her ear. She did not answer. Instead, she tugged at his coat to silence him, and appeared to be listening intently. No other sound broke the silence, however, which had settled down again after her vigorous knocking like birds returning after they have flown away from some food.

"All right," she murmured, after the lapse of three minutes. She then wound a thick muffler about her hand and broke a pane of glass.

"In with you," she whispered to her nephew. Carey, leather-gauntleted, removed the jagged pieces of glass by the light of a miniature torch, put his hand in, found the catch, and in a few seconds was climbing in through the window. A moment later he had unbarred the door, and both of them were inside.

"Senss's office," said Carey, leading the way up the stairs—for Bassin had described closely his interview with Mr. Senss. The office door was closed, but was not locked. They entered, switched on the light, and explored for copies of the book. None could be found. There was the broad mantelpiece, used as a bookshelf, bearing about eighteen volumes of various sizes, but the book by Carn was not among them.

"Better try Saxant's office. I don't know which is his room," Carey muttered, closing the door behind him. Suddenly he laid a startled hand on Mrs. Bradley's arm. Down below them, someone was moving about. They could hear dragging sounds.

The unknown was unaware, it was very soon obvious, that he was not alone in the building. He made no attempt to disguise the noise he was making, and as they listened they could distinguish the bumping of furniture and the flat sound made by books being dropped on the floor.

Carey sat down and took off his shoes. Then he crept to the door, opened it noiselessly, and crouched at the stairhead, listening. At a sudden cessation of all sound from below, Mrs. Bradley took out her pocket-torch and switched off the electric light with an almost imperceptible click. As it seemed within the bounds of possibility that the other occupant of the house was also searching for a copy of Carn's book, and might, in fact, be Carn's murderer, she also took out a knife, which, ostensibly intended for fruit, happened also to be nicely weighted for throwing. Carey, she learned later, had provided himself with a spanner from the motor cycle kit.

They waited at the stairhead for what seemed a very long time. The unknown appeared to be suspicious, but, beyond opening the door of a downstairs room and standing at the crack—it could have been no more, they deduced—as though he were listening, he made no move to come upstairs.

"Scared," thought Carey.

"No more business here than we have," thought Mrs. Bradley. They shared their theories later.

Then the unknown began his search again. He seemed to be prosecuting it in a vigorous, not to say hurried and nervous, manner. They heard two chairs fall over, and the sounds of drawers being wrenched open and slammed shut. Once one of the drawers stuck and the searcher made grunting efforts to close it. They strained their ears, hoping to hear him curse, to get a clue in the sound of his voice, but the unknown had too much self-control, not enough spare breath, or too much caution to emit a single voluntary sound.

At last the drawer gave way, and shot in with a noise like a gunshot. More books fell on the floor, and then there was a different-sounding noise, followed by a split second of dead silence, and then a gasp, as though there had been a major mishap. What it was they were able to deduce the next moment, for the sound of liquid dropping in a steady trickle on to a linoleum-covered floor was audible, and, to Carey, had all the sinister significance of the spattering of blood from a death-wound.

"Cut himself badly," was his first thought.

"Ink," was Mrs. Bradley's. She laid a skinny claw on his wrist as he began to move closer to the stairhead. That the searcher below was, at any rate, not seriously wounded soon became apparent, for, having performed the operation of mopping something up, he went on with his feverish investigations.

Carey began to creep back, away from the stairs. Outside the window of Senss's room there was an iron fire-escape. From the position of the room below in which the unknown was conducting operations, he deduced that the ladder should end outside those windows. Determination to discover the identity of the intruder caused him to go to the window, feel for the catch, open it, and climb out on to the escape. His intention had been to flash his torch in at the window, and then, having identified the searcher, to climb back again up the escape.

Half-way down, however, it occurred to him that if the unknown happened to be armed with a revolver, the situation might become very awkward, so he began to climb back again to warn his aunt of what he intended to do, and to advise her to take cover.

"If he had a revolver," whispered Mrs. Bradley, "he would have come up here when he had his suspicions before."

Carey thought this good reasoning, and had repeated his downward climb and reached the ground level when the

light in the room was switched on, and he saw a huge grotesque shadow on the blind, which had been drawn across the window. So his idea was of no use at all, he thought disgustedly. Suddenly his attention was attracted by some peculiarity in the shadow, which appeared to be standing in a ruminating attitude. It seemed to be talking to itself, he thought at first. There was a steady motion of jaw and chin, presented profile-wise to his gaze, which indicated conversation, and yet, unless the words were a monotonous repetition of one another, surely there was something altogether too rhythmic for the recognised intricacies of speech in that steady movement. Then it came to him that the man was not talking but chewing.

"Good heavens!" thought Carey, memory flashing back. "It's that confounded office boy come back to loot the place after hours in search of spare cash or something."

He banged on the window. The chewing silhouette gave a startled leap. There was another crash, followed by two duller ones indicative of the slamming of doors. In a moment Mrs. Bradley was beside her nephew.

"You've got rid of him, then?" she said.

"I know who he is," said Carey. "He's the office boy here, who chews gum. He was chewing it in there. I got him silhouetted against the blind."

"But has it not occurred to you, dear child, that the office boy may not be the only person in the world who chews gum?"

"Yes, that's true, but I'd pretty well swear to the profile. It was a very good shadowgraph of him, as shadows go. I don't think there's very much doubt. Besides, he's sure to have left some fingerprints about."

"Yes, but it might be difficult for us, as law-breakers ourselves, to convince the police of the advisability of obtaining the young man's fingerprints for purposes of comparison, dear child."

"Um, that's true, but I dare say we could explain."

"Another point is that the young man probably would find no difficulty in proving that, as office boy, his duties bring him occasionally into this room, and that if his fingerprints are found on any objects in here, there is a legitimate reason for their being there."

"Oh, lor! I *have* mucked it," said Carey. "We ought to have gone down the stairs and caught him red-handed."

"I can see grave objections to that. He does not know, as things stand, what persons have been in the house with him tonight, and that, if my theory (at present, I ought to tell you, unsupported by even the shadow of a fact)—"

"Good. Those are the theories I like."

"If my theory is correct, it will be just as well, for us, that our identity was not disclosed."

"Oh, you mean, he *didn't* come to pilfer the office cash?"

"I think he came on the same errand as our own, child."

"To find Carn's book?"

"Precisely. And from that I deduce that Mr. Carn's book has been particularly carefully hidden."

"Afraid of sabotage, perhaps. I should think most Jews would want to bum the place down if they knew what was in that book."

"At any rate, it seems as though the office staff do not know where the copies are kept."

"It may be only the corrected proof, you know. We don't *know* that the printing has been done."

"I should imagine it has been, though. Didn't you tell me that a copy had been promised to Mr. Bassin this week? Or last week, was it? And business at this time of year is always slack."

"Yes, he did promise him one, and it's quite true that printing presses, even large commercial concerns, often are slack in the summer, just before the autumn season of novels commences. They get a rash of work a little later. I should think Senss meant to give him one, though, unless

the cancellation makes a difference. Of course, we could go and see Saxant."

"Let us go to his house tomorrow and pump him. Meanwhile, as it seems most unlikely that our friend of the chewing gum proposes to return, let us ascend in order to inspect this room which, at present, is barred from our notice," said Mrs. Bradley, leading the way.

They climbed the fire-escape again, re-entered Senss's office, and, from it, descended the stairs. The room in which the search had been prosecuted was the scene of much disorder, and on the desk was a bottle of purple ink which had been righted, but which showed evidence of having been upset, and this apart from the stains on desk and floor where the fluid had been hastily mopped up with the blotting paper which was discovered by Carey in the waste-paper basket.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Bradley. As though he had done it to oblige them, the searcher had inked his thumb and then had dabbed it down, an unconsciously rendered signature, on the edge of a sheet of slightly absorbent duplicating paper, which was lying on the blotting-pad on the desk. As though he had not removed all the ink at the first application, he had dabbed again and yet again, so that, although the first print was heavily inked and rather blurred, the second was clear and almost perfect, and even the third had characteristics from which the identity of the owner could in all probability be traced.

"There will be people able to declare that this ink had not been spilled when the office was locked up for the night," Mrs. Bradley observed, "and even if a charwoman usually comes in later to tidy up, which, from the condition of the waste-paper basket, empty except for this piece of inky blotting-paper, seems likely, a comparison of her thumb-print with these on the typing paper would prove that she was not the person with the inky thumb."

"Besides, she'd have chucked away the blotting-paper, wouldn't she?"

"Yes, she would, if she were there to clear up and clean. We will take charge of this piece of duplicating paper, therefore."

She took out her note-book, and carefully placed the folded sheet inside it.

"Now, I suppose, we had better get on with our search," suggested Carey. "If it's very much use, that is."

"I am convinced that it is of no use whatever, dear child. Nevertheless, for our own peace of mind, we will go on."

They found nothing which offered even the slightest clue to the whereabouts of the printed copies (if these were in existence) or of the corrected proofs.

"Awkward," said Carey, preparing to abandon the search. "I expect the proofs are in the office safe. Wish I knew how to bust it."

"An irregular and dangerous proceeding, child, even if we had the means, I fear."

"Yes. But there's no doubt at all, Aunt Adela, that the clue lies somewhere in that corrected copy of Carn's book."

"I hope," said his aunt, "that Mr. Bassin will let me have the uncorrected proofs to study."

"Of course he will. Bassin and I have been over them until we know them by heart, but apart from what are obviously printer's errors, the 'b's and 'd's, for example—"

"Those are more probably author's errors, dear child. Moreover, there is one which has peculiar significance."

"You mean that '*Donner*' and '*Bonner*' one. I've thought that over to the point of migraine, but still can't see where it fits. No, we *must* have the corrected proofs! That was what the murderer of Mrs. Carn was after. That's where the importance of the thing lies. Anyway, love, let's go. I'm becoming nervous."

"Not so, dear child. We are going to spend the night here."

"Says you!"

"Visualise the way back to the road, child."

"You don't mean—"

"I only know that whilst you were toying lovingly with the office safe I went to the window which looks on to the alley, and saw somebody in the act of covering a dark lantern. I propose that we go upstairs again, where Mr. Senss has a couple of easy chairs, and make ourselves as comfortable as we can for the night. Who, do you suppose, comes first to the offices in the morning?"

"The office boy, I take it."

"Yes, I should think so. Mr. Saxant, we know, does not put in an appearance until eleven, and presumably Mr. Senss is not very much earlier. Let us watch for the arrival of this office boy."

"Blackmail him into silence by a whispered word that we have his thumb-print and know that he was in the office last night—"

"I don't think so, child. We don't want to advertise the fact of our own invasion of the office. This boy is not working alone."

"Oh... Well, what then?"

"I anticipate that the person or persons with the dark lantern will not wait in the alley after daylight. Our best plan, I think, will be to escape from the back of the house, having turned the key on the youth so that he cannot follow us."

"But I don't know what the back of the house is like."

"No. But the dawn will disclose all that. Probably it opens on to a paddock."

"More likely on to some righteous citizen's back garden."

"Well, we must hope for the best. Luckily we are on foot, and have no need to go round to the end of the alley

for a car or motor cycle." She led the way upstairs. "Shall we toss for beds, dear child?"

Their night's rest, however, did not remain undisturbed. They had been lying back in their arm-chairs for about an hour and a half when both sat up and began to sniff the air.

"Something burning," muttered Carey. Mrs. Bradley, more prompt to action than her nephew, went over to the office telephone and gave the alarm. Then they crept down the fire-escape again, and felt their way cautiously round an angle of the building. The back of the house, it appeared, opened on to a small square plot of ground surrounded by a wall. Suddenly on this wall appeared a dark silhouette. Carey, with a beserk cry, leapt forward and seized the climber, presumably by the leg. Mrs. Bradley hastened to his assistance, but, with a yell and a German expletive, the climber tumbled towards Carey, who bore him to the ground, where they kicked and threshed about until Carey announced that he had got him, and asked what they were going to do with him.

"It's—"

A noise of bell-ringing cut him short. The fire brigade had arrived. Mrs. Bradley jerked her nephew by the shoulder, and darted at the wall like the lizard she so much resembled. Her nephew gave her a hoist and then scrambled after her. They dropped to the ground on the other side and found themselves in the grounds of the Methodist chapel. Their first intimation of this was when Carey stumbled down a couple of steps, which led to the furnace room, underneath the building.

"Stay there," hissed Mrs. Bradley, "and get down."

She joined him, and they crouched together on the steps. There was no sign of the man that Carey had just released, but plenty of evidence that the fire brigade was active. The fire itself had taken hold. The air was thick with smoke, and tongues of flame were shooting out of windows.

"Good-bye to those proofs," muttered Carey.

"If they're in that house," said his aunt. "Let us sneak round this building, whatever it is, and get back on the road."

"It must be the Methodist chapel," said Carey, getting up. "This way, then. Heavens! It's as black as pitch."

The way, although dark, was straightforward enough, however. The gates which led on to the road were shut and padlocked, but fortunately were surmountable. It was not long before they were out on the public highway and on their way back to the inn.

"Who was the man?" asked Mrs. Bradley.

"The German who calls himself Simplon."

"And whose name in Germany is Bonner, if Mr. Senss's slip of the tongue when he was talking to Mr. Bassin was correctly rendered by the young man. And the mistake on the uncorrected proof has a certain significance, therefore. And this Mr. Bonner is suspected by Mr. Senss of being a Nazi agent."

"I suppose he set fire to the place and was making his escape."

"Possibly he was the employer of the chewing gum office boy."

"The boy reported that he couldn't lay hands on the proofs—"

"And that somebody else was about the place, probably searching for them, too—"

"I say, though," said Carey, "it's all a bit odd, you know, isn't it?"

"In what particular way?"

"Well, if Bonner really is a Nazi agent, why should he care two hoots about an anti-Jewish book? You'd think, if anything, he'd welcome it."

"Don't obscure the argument, child. Besides, we don't know yet that Mr. Simplon-Bonner started the fire. We don't know that the office boy is in his pay. We have no proof, even, that he *is* a Nazi agent."

"No," said Carey doubtfully, "but I think Senss knows what he's talking about."

"Did Mr. Bonner see you clearly, do you think, when you were fighting?"

"Absolutely certain not to have done, and yet—a funny thing—he seemed to recognise me, because he suddenly growled: "So, it's you again, is it?" I suppose he *must* have recognised me, somehow, as the bloke who nearly walked underneath his car. Remember?"

"A pity. I had hoped we might have come and gone tonight without anyone being privy to the fact that we were not safely in our beds at the inn."

"Never mind. He knows there's something fishy about me, but he isn't wise to you yet. That's the great thing. Only I thought I couldn't just let him drop out of our lives over that wall without finding out who he was. Still, the whole thing becomes fairly rummy, you must confess."

"It has its points of interest," Mrs. Bradley agreed. "By the way, child, when the fire engine cut our conversation short, you were about to give me the man's name, were you not?"

"Yes, and, like a fool, I was going to tell you he was Bonner."

"Yes, I was afraid you were going to say that. I don't know that it would be a good plan to let him know that you have heard any other name for him than Simplon. I'm getting old, and I expect, confidently I may say, to die before you do, but if—"

"Yes, yes, I know. Simplon it is, until the end of the chapter. Not that I see him as a murderer. You know, I think the police are wrong to have taken hold of the Carn end of the thing to unravel the mystery. The thing obviously begins with *Mrs.* Carn. I do think they should persevere with that enquiry, don't you?"

"If we knew all, we should probably find that they are persevering with it, child. Their trouble is to find a motive for

Mrs. Carn's death."

"The possession of the proofs and the letters, I should say."

"On the other hand, the original theory of the police, that Carn himself killed his wife, still has something to recommend it, I do not doubt."

"But they were a devoted couple. Everybody says so."

"Yes, so I understand. I still think that we should ask the printers for a copy of the book."

"I'm not sure. Suppose we tackle Saxant and he simply refuses to give us one? You suggested it yourself, if you remember. What shall you do if he turns funny on you?"

"He will have to give some reason, I imagine. He is not like our Mr. Simplon, who is capable, presumably of giving an unqualified refusal."

"You're right, but I expect he'll say that only the hundred copies Carn ordered have been printed. Or else he'll say that now they've received this letter forbidding them to issue the copies, he can't very well see his way to—etc.—until the experts have made up their minds whether Carn's signature is genuine."

"I still think that we should ask, however, child."

"Yes. We'll go to Saxant, preferably at his house."

The back way into the inn, through the kitchens and up the servants' staircase, was accessible, and they found no difficulty in getting back to their rooms. Carey pulled off his clothes and fell into bed, there to sleep until the servant woke him in the morning with early tea. Mrs. Bradley got into bed, propped herself up with pillows, switched on her bed-head light, and picked up a book. It was deliberately chosen, and she read it with some care, and made hieroglyphics, in her own peculiar shorthand, in a small leather-covered note-book. Her choice of reading was the story of William Prynne, of which she had spoken to Carey. Prynne, the Puritan, had criticised Laud, the Archbishop. Prynne had lost his ears, his money, and his liberty. He had

also been branded on the cheek for a seditious libeller. Carn, the novelist and essayist, had criticised the Jews. Carn had lost his life, his ears, and his right hand.

There remained the, so far, unaccountable facts that the ears had been sent to Mrs. Saxant, who could have had nothing whatever to do with the printing of Carn's book, and that the right hand of the corpse had been cut off at another printing works.

"Odd," said Mrs. Bradley to herself, as these thoughts came into her head. She put down the book, her note-book, and pencil, and switched off the light. But she did not go to sleep. She pondered the problem for another hour and a half—in fact, until the dawn broke. Then she slept for two hours, and had been out for a walk by the time that Carey joined her at breakfast.

"I don't now see any connection with Prynne," she said.

"Must be, love. The ears."

"Done to shock Mrs. Saxant, that was all."

"Somehow I don't think that's all of it."

"Well, why the hand, then, child?"

"Ah, there you have me, of course. Punishment for treason, at one time."

"Yes, in the fifteenth century."

"Carn wasn't a German, I suppose?"

"We could find out, of course."

"I mean, this anti-Jew stuff would almost argue that he was. In which case, treason—see what I mean, old soul?"

"No, I don't. Eat your breakfast before it gets cold, dear child."

"In the sixteenth century," said Carey suddenly, "wilful murderers had their right hands cut off before they were hanged."

"Wilful murderers," said Mrs. Bradley thoughtfully. "That opens up a field for Speculation, child." She did not add that the same fact had already opened up a field of speculation for her on the previous night, or that it had been followed,

as she lay wakeful and thinking deeply, by the familiar, in the circumstances, misplaced caption, "Signature tune," which flashed across her brain.

"Whose signature? And what tune?" she said. But her nephew, who had just seen hog-puddings on the menu, did not hear her.

• CHAPTER 7 •

The House on the Ridge

“Tell them to master to revenge himself tomorrow at the Maiden’s Castle, where he shall see me again.”

Mr. Geoffrey Saxant, the senior partner of Saxant and Senss, lived just outside the pretty little village of Aubery. A chalk ridge rose behind the village, and he had built his house high enough to obtain a wide view over the valley with its sluggish, cloud-reflecting river, its farmstead, and its fields.

George drove Carey and Mrs. Bradley sedately out of the inn-yard, and took half an hour exactly to bring them to Mr. Saxant’s front door. The garden went down in terraces towards the river, but the drive wound serpent-wise up the hill to end on a level forty-yard stretch along the front of the house.

Mrs. Saxant was gardening. She rose from her knees when the car drew up, and came forward to meet her visitors. Mrs. Bradley introduced herself and presented her nephew.

“And now,” she said, “we’ve come about those ears.”

“I don’t understand. You’re not from a newspaper, are you?”

“No. We’re friends of Mr. Carn’s solicitor. My aunt is assisting Mr. Justus Bassin.”

“But an arrest has been made... I didn’t think there was any more to be done.”

"The wrong arrest has been made. Moreover, we have good reason to believe that the letter lately received by your husband requesting him to cancel publication of Mr. Carn's last book is a forgery."

"I know there's some doubt about that. But you must understand that I know very little about my husband's business."

"Nevertheless, you know something about his partner," said Carey, eyeing her. The effect of this remark was surprising. Mrs. Saxant went pale, then flushed, swallowed, opened her mouth, shut it, and then, pulling herself together, made the following astounding response:

"Oh, I see. Blackmail. Perhaps you'd better come in."

French windows, leading into the drawing-room were open. She dropped her gardening gloves on the step, and without troubling even to wipe her gardening boots, which left earthy clods and impressions on the polished floorboards, led the way in, and pointed to a couple of chairs.

"First," said Mrs. Bradley, "what did Mr. Carn look like?"

"He looked a thorough literary man."

"Ah, yes, I know," said Carey. "Joseph Conrad beard and Arnold Bennett moustaches. I've seen photographs of him, I think."

"Second," said Mrs. Bradley, "did you recognise the ears for Mr. Carn's?"

"Of course not. I couldn't think of anything in the terrible shock of opening that horrible parcel. I could have recognised them, though, if I hadn't been so badly upset."

"Third, what made your husband agree to print Carn's book?"

"I don't know at all. It was a business proposition, I suppose."

"Didn't you persuade him to print it?"

"I may have said it would be a good thing to print it. Carn was a famous man."

"And a very unpopular one."

"I don't understand."

"Your husband didn't like Carn very much."

"I don't think Carn had many friends. Very clever men are usually disliked, don't you think?"

"Did Mr. Senss like Carn?" asked Mrs. Bradley, forbearing to point out that Mrs. Saxant had already contradicted herself.

"I haven't the least idea. Tell me why you've come, and what you want."

"Information. We have not come to blackmail you, Mrs. Saxant. I deduce that Carn was your lover."

"You deduce it?"

"Well, somebody sent you his ears. There must have been some reason for that. You could have recognised the ears, you say. How?"

"He had had them pierced to take ear-rings. Nobody knew it except me. It was a joke between us. It was for amateur theatricals, I think."

"You mean that you know. Were you the heroine of the play?"

"Yes. What are you after? Why are you asking me these things?"

"A pretty woman horribly frightened is an unpleasant sight," thought Carey.

"Does Mr. Senss know that Mr. Carn was your lover?" Mrs. Bradley implacably continued.

"No, of course not. Nobody knew. I don't see how you know. Or about Kurt Senss either. A woman can't help it if men are silly about her, can she?"

"Somebody knew, and told me."

"Who was it told you?"

"I don't know his name yet. The person who sent you the ears must have known. What did your husband say when he saw the ears?"

"I really don't remember." She looked, thought Carey, ready to burst into tears under all this bullying.

"Never mind. Where is your husband now?"

"He's gone to the printing press."

"Oh?" said Mrs. Bradley, looking at her watch. "He doesn't usually go so early, does he?"

"No. He usually leaves the house at half-past ten."

"And it isn't more than ten o'clock now."

"No. You see, he received a telephone message to say that there had been a fire at the works."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Very sorry. Was it a bad fire, do you know?"

"Not nearly as bad as it might have been. It seems that somebody gave the alarm immediately. Geoffrey says he would give a hundred pounds to whoever it was, if he could trace him, but he's not going to advertise the fact, because he'd attract a lot of greedy sharks who'd had nothing whatever to do with it."

"Is your husband a generous man, Mrs. Saxant?"

The woman looked at her cautiously for a moment, and then said huskily, with the fear gone from her voice:

"Why do you ask me that?"

"He is, then?"

"Yes, he is—very. Not only in material things."

"No. That's what I meant. Well, we must go. Mrs. Saxant, would you swear to those ears?"

"Yes... yes, I suppose so," Mrs. Saxant replied, looking at Mrs. Bradley with horrible fascination. She was still standing at the French windows when Mrs. Bradley looked back at the bend in the drive.

"Why on earth did she come across like that?" asked Carey, when the car had been driven through the gates and was out on the road again. "She seems the Delilah of the neighbourhood, does she not?"

"She's a badly frightened woman," replied his aunt, "and, so far, we have done nothing to reassure her. She

thought her friendship for Carn had been kept a close secret. The present of the ears undeceived her. She loves her husband, and does not want to hurt him, but she can't forbear to take these lovers when the opportunity comes."

"And Senss is another of them. Shouldn't have thought he was the sort, funnily enough. Of course—his partner's wife—I suppose there are opportunities—not exactly behaviour *comme il faut*, though, is it, do you think?"

Mrs. Bradley picked up the speaking-tube, and directed George to take them back to the "Lion."

"But I thought you particularly wanted to visit Saxant?" said Carey.

"Not at the printing press, child. Besides, there will be some confusion there, after the fire."

"Yes, of course. Do you think she'd have been easier in her mind, in one sense, if we *had* proved to be blackmailers?"

"Well, child, in one sense, that's exactly what we are. We are using the fact that she is in a badly frightened state in order to extort information, which otherwise she would not give us. Not, as you would say, behaviour *comme il faut*."

George stopped the car and got out.

"If you please, madam," he said, coming round to Mrs. Bradley's window, "I am under the impression that we are being followed by a car from the house at which you and Mr. Lestrangle were calling this morning. Am I to continue directly back to the hotel?"

"Oh, yes, I think so, George. Thank you for the information."

"I say, we *have* scared her," said Carey. "And the beauty of it is that my first remark, the one that nearly made her swoon, was not even intended to be a shot in the dark. It was of the purest mashed-potato type, and didn't mean a thing. She gave the game away nicely."

"Yes. Not really cut out for the part of unfaithful wife, poor creature. Lots of them aren't. They're victims of boredom, very often."

"Do you think Mrs. Saxant bored, then?"

"To distraction, except when her garden grows. And even then I expect she wants someone to take an interest in the growing, and lovers are good at that."

"Yes," said Carey, reminiscently. "I remember before the era of Jenny, some ghastly girl who used to design women's overalls. Everybody suffers in the cause of love, I expect."

"Talking of love," said his aunt, "I perceive Adonis in person, awaiting us on the doorstep." Carey looked out. The athletic and handsome Mr. Bassin was standing on the step outside the lounge.

"And to what are we indebted for this favour?" asked Carey, grinning. Bassin smiled and replied.

"Oh, we're being retained by Lyle's on behalf of young Mabb, and my father has sent me back again."

"Deuced philanthropic of Lyle's, isn't it? And why you, when they've got their own solicitors? What are Lyle's like, really?"

"They're a pretty good firm, you know, and their argument is that young Mabb knows nowt about the business. They say—the son of the senior partner also plays cricket—that the police argument that there was bad blood between Carn and Mabb is just a lot of rot. Mabb, in fact, according to young Bertie Lyle, managed very tactfully as captain, and got on better with Carn than anybody else in the position would have done. Mabb appears to be, in fact, a worthy cove all round. Keeps his mother and younger sister—sister at a County Secondary School—Sunday-school boy —"

"So was Norman Thorne," said Carey. "Doesn't mean a thing, except, probably, lack of the brassier type of neck."

"Anyhow, Lyle's are convinced of his innocence, and have briefed—don't laugh!—Ferdinand Lestrangle for the

defence.” He grinned at Mrs. Bradley, to whom Carey hastened to introduce him.

“A most immoral boy,” said Mrs. Bradley, referring to her son Ferdinand.

“Family affair altogether,” said Carey. “Come on. Let’s in and drink.”

“If Mabb hadn’t sneaked out at the gate to have speech with his girl instead of going to the canteen where his mates could have given him an alibi, the police would have very little against him,” Bassin continued, when they were in the lounge, with its enormous Tudor fireplace, and the young men had been served with cocktails and Mrs. Bradley with sherry. “Oh, and it’s still more or less of a mystery what Carn did and where he went on the day of his wife’s death.”

“Not such a mystery,” said Carey. “We had speech with Mrs. Saxant, to whom Carn’s ears were sent, and she came across very nicely with the information that she and Carn—”

“Oh?” said Bassin. “So that’s why he didn’t take a hat.”

“Didn’t what?”

“Well, a minor mystery about Carn’s disappearance, you know, was that he didn’t take a hat. He hopped it the first time, with some suddenness, it appears, just before lunch, going off *sans chapeau*, and then appeared again, plus hat, a new one, which he had bought. Then he went off again, once more without a hat, leaving even the new one behind. Ergo, he went to friends, presumably in the immediate neighbourhood.”

“Yes, but Aubery, where the Saxants live, isn’t all that much in the immediate neighbourhood,” argued Carey.

“No. But you know your Sherlock Holmes. ‘I see that you have no gentleman visitor at present. Your hat-stand proclaims as much.’ Well, see also Mrs. Saxant: precautions observed when visiting same in capacity of alienator of wife’s affections. I suppose all her suitors had standing orders to leave their hats at home.”

"Something in it, undoubtedly. What do you think, love?"

"Mr. Bassin has made a point there," said Mrs. Bradley. "I think we might do worse than interview Mrs. Saxant again. Doubtless, by this time, the servants will have received orders to throw us out. Rightly. But we must see."

"One other point emerges in this connection," observed Bassin. "Carn presumably went to the Saxants' house on foot. It's a good long walk, you know."

"Oh, no. Mrs. Saxant met him with the car. Prearranged," said Carey. "That would account for the very odd time of departure, on that first occasion, just before lunch, you know. It came out clearly at the inquest on Mrs. Carn that no message had come to the house."

"But if they wanted to keep their affair dark, surely it was a very queer time to have arranged?" suggested Carey.

"Perhaps they couldn't help themselves. Do you know what I think? I think they *had* to meet that day. Not just a lovers' meeting, but about something sinister, or in some way significant."

"If so, you'd think that Carn would at least have staged a quarrel with his wife before walking out of the house when lunch was practically on the table."

"Mrs. Carn wouldn't have been at all an easy person to pick a quarrel with," said Bassin, with the remembrance of her dignity and sweetness vividly present in his mind.

"I suppose Carn *was* murdered?" said Carey, "or, conversely, is a murderer?"

"Why, how do you mean?"

"You don't think that perhaps he committed suicide when he found that his wife was dead?"

"He was an odd kind of fish, as this rabid book of his proves, but I can't see any reason—"

"Not if he thought that Mrs. Carn's death was the direct result of his affair with Mrs. Saxant?"

"You mean that Saxant was the murderer of Mrs. Carn?"

“Or Mrs. Saxant. She’s scared enough to have done half a dozen murders.”

“Let’s have lunch,” said Mrs. Bradley, getting up and leading the way to the dining-room. Their table was in the window, overlooking the yard, and beyond it was the pleasant garden. Lunch was plain and good, and all conversation, except of a general nature, was shelved.

By two o’clock they were ready to go out again. This time Bassin accompanied them, and George, driving sedately, presented them at Mrs. Saxant’s front door at two minutes after two-thirty. It had been arranged that Bassin should be the person to request an interview, and should ask for it with Mr. Saxant.

Mrs. Saxant’s demeanour had changed. She was no longer the obviously frightened woman of Carey’s description. She received Bassin with some show of cordiality, said that she thought it a shame that young Mabb had been arrested, that Fortinbras Carn had been difficult to get on with and that she was very sorry to say that an interview with Geoffrey was impossible at the moment because he was at the works.

“Well, now, look here, Mrs. Saxant,” said Bassin persuasively, “I knew Mrs. Carn and liked her—”

“Yes, oh, yes, a sweet woman.”

“—and there are one or two things I’d like to know. No doubt you have been in communication with your own solicitor—”

“Immediately those people who have accompanied you this afternoon—”

“Oh, yes. But you must understand that Mrs. Bradley is making a psychological study of the case, and naturally—”

“She hasn’t anything to do with the police?”

“The police? What an idea!”

“Oh? Still, she had no right whatever to question me,” said Mrs. Saxant reasonably. “I mean, I didn’t know who

they were, and I can't see why I should have to put up with a lot of impertinent questions about my private affairs."

"Not exactly, no, of course not. The thing is, that there was no compulsion on you to give her any answers."

"Yes, well, it's the same thing exactly."

"Not really, you know. But let it pass."

"I'm not going to let it pass. If she so much as gets out of that car, I'm going to summon her for trespass."

"I don't think you could do that."

"She menaced me this morning. It was most frightening."

"I suggest that it is your own conscience which frightens you, Mrs. Saxant."

She hesitated before replying to that. Then she said, with an honesty for which he gave her credit.

"Yes, you're quite right, it is. But I'm not going to say a word to anybody except in front of my lawyer."

"You've had the police here, then?"

"Yes, of course we've had the police."

"I do wish you'd tell me just one thing." His voice and youthful good looks made a good impression on her. She did not want to tell him anything at all, particularly anything relating to the deaths of Carn and his wife, but it was not easy to resist him. "Remember, I represent a falsely accused young fellow who never did anybody any harm," he said.

"Well," she said, involuntarily, but not in a disgruntled tone, "what do you want to know?"

"Did Carn visit you here on the day that his wife was murdered?"

She distended her eyes a moment. He thought that she was going to refuse to answer. Then she said: "Yes, he did."

"Twice, wasn't it?"

"Yes. But how do you know?"

"Never mind. You can take it that I do know. I'm not making shots in the dark."

"No, I can tell that," she answered, reverting to the frightened tones in which she had answered Carey and Mrs. Bradley that same morning.

"The first was pre-arranged, wasn't it?"

"Yes. We had come to some arrangement about—"

"About—?"

"It was about Kurt Senss. He is a very interfering sort of man, and he's fond of Geoffrey—of my husband. He feels grateful to him because Geoffrey took him on when he first escaped from Germany. He'd had a bad time—his brother was killed—committed suicide, the Nazis said, of course—in a concentration camp. The family weren't even allowed to open the coffin when the authorities brought it to the house. Kurt managed to get away, but he was weeks in hiding—half-starved and with no prospects—it was like heaven to him, he said, when Geoffrey offered him a job. Of course it hasn't done the printing press any harm, and in any case Geoffrey can afford it. The press is really only a hobby, you know. That's why he runs it to death, and is never at home. Well, Kurt found out about Fortinbras and me, and said that, customer or no customer, he should tell Geoffrey all about Fortinbras unless we pledged ourselves to stop it. So we arranged to meet at a time when there wasn't the faintest chance of Geoffrey's being at home (I knew he had a luncheon engagement in Falshanger with some of the local councillors), so I fixed that time, and asked Fortinbras to meet me—I'd have the car, and we'd drive out into the country and—well, and say good-bye."

"And it took you from one o'clock until about ten at night to say good-bye?"

"Oh, no, of course it didn't. Fortinbras left me at three, and I drove home."

"Where were you when he left you?"

"In Oxford. He went home by train."

"A two hours' journey. Not more. He took his time about it!"

"I don't know anything at all about that. Really, really, I don't."

Bassin believed her.

"Then, his second visit to your home?"

"Yes, well, Geoffrey was there as well, and so was Kurt. He often brought Kurt home to dinner and sometimes Kurt stayed the night. We were in the drawing-room, when there came a banging at those French doors, and Geoffrey went across to open them, and Kurt took out the revolver he always carries, but it was only Fortinbras. He tumbled into the room and said, half crying: 'They've done for her! They've done for Myra, the brutes!' Kurt and Geoffrey got him into a chair and gave him a drink, and got out of him all that he could tell them. It wasn't much, and what it was you know. It was in the papers."

"And then?"

"Geoffrey said he'd go back with him, but Fortinbras declared he couldn't go back. 'They'll get me, too,' he said. And, of course," she added, breaking off and giving Bassin a terrified glance, "they did get him, didn't they?"

"Presumably. But whom did he mean?"

"The people who wrote the threatening letters. He had told us all about those, and when he left—to go back home, after all, we thought, of course—he begged me to tell Geoffrey not to publish the book."

"What book?" asked Bassin startled.

"The book that Geoffrey and Kurt Senss were printing and publishing. I don't know what it was called. I was saying good-bye to him, and Geoffrey had gone to see about the car to take him home, because he'd walked all the way to our house, and Kurt had gone to see about his own car, because he wasn't staying, and so for a few minutes we were left alone. I asked him why he didn't tell Geoffrey himself, and he said—he was always rather 'little-boy' in some ways—that he didn't want Geoffrey to think he was afraid."

"Mrs. Saxant, this may be extremely important. I represent Mr. Carn's interests, remember, as well as the arrested man Mabb. Are you seriously informing me that Mr. Carn asked you to suggest to your husband not to print that book?"

"Yes. He asked me to do it, in this room. Why is it so important?"

"The police have decided to pin the affair on Mabb, but there are indications that the real point at issue is this book. I'll call on your husband at the works. Thank you so much, Mrs. Saxant. It is good of you to have listened to me. I'm really tremendously grateful. Did you give your husband Carn's message, by the way?"

"Well, it was awkward. Fortinbras made me promise that I wouldn't say the message came from him. I was to give it as though it was my own idea. Then, he wouldn't wait for the car. Of course, I know the reason now. He didn't intend to go back to the House by the Brook. He kissed me good-bye and ran out at the French doors again, and then Geoffrey came back to say the car was ready, and Kurt came in to say good-bye, and they were both so astonished to find him gone. And then, later on, I forgot, I was so worried and frightened, and then, when we learned that he was dead—"

"I think," said Bassin, as the car turned a corner into the village street, "that we should go directly to the House by the Brook, and ask permission to interview some of the servants."

So George garaged the car, and Carey, Bassin and Mrs. Bradley walked beside the brook to Carn's house. Carn's brother received them with courtesy, listened gravely to Bassin's request, and then placed the dining-room at their disposal.

"Who does he think we are?" whispered Carey to his aunt. "Doesn't he know we've got no official status?"

"But we have. Justus represents the family solicitors, dear child. Whom are we going to interview, Justus?"

"The girl who admitted me to the house on the afternoon of Mrs. Carn's death."

The girl began to cry as soon as her late mistress's name was mentioned.

"Come, come," said Bassin, "you remember me, I'm sure."

"I don't want to answer no more questions. I want to forget it," said the girl.

"But we are not the police. I know they came and bothered you. Don't you remember how glad you were to see me, that other time when I came?"

"Yes, but, then, I never knowed what trouble you was going to bring. 'Twasn't till missus give you that there black box and all them silly, stupid old letters that anything dreadful did happen."

Before Bassin could reply, Mrs. Bradley, who had been scribbling hastily in her note-book, fixed her black eyes on the girl and demanded suddenly:

"Why did Mrs. Carn send for Mr. Bassin? Do you know?"

"Yes, we all knowed that. It was so she could give him the box and the letters. Cook listened outside the door."

"Very helpful of Cook. Go away, and send her in."

"You'd best not bustle Cook. She'll give in her notice," said the girl, speaking resentfully.

Cook proved to be the level-headed, kindly servant who, alone of all the crew of them, had made any attempt to stay with and help her stricken mistress. This fact Bassin conveyed to Mrs. Bradley as soon as the woman came in.

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Bradley. "Cook, did you ever meet a young workman called Jonathan Mabb?"

"What, him they arrested for killing the master, madam? No, that I never did, and neither did he kill him."

"Why do you assert that quite so positively?"

“Master’s death and missus’s death was all on account of them letters. I had one, and Lily had one, and Tom Tilly—though why they should bother with him!—he had one and all. Some rubbishy stuff they was. I took no truck with them.”

“About Mr. Carn’s book, were they not?”

“Mine weren’t. I’ve got a copy of it.”

“Oh? I thought Mrs. Carn made a point of securing all the letters herself?”

“Ah, later on. But nobody’s got the right to interfere with correspondence, and if a letter’s addressed to me, to me it’s addressed, says I. I could show the copy, so be you shouldn’t believe me.”

“I’d like to see it, Cook.”

Cook went away, and returned very promptly indeed with a black book labelled *Recipes*.

“And recipes is what it *don’t* contain,” she observed with the zest of the diplomat, “but, just so as pokenoses, of which there’s plenty about, shan’t ferret with my private concerns, not to mention them girls.”

She opened the book, secured the pages with two elastic bands so that on no account could the reader, without removing the bands, see anything which was written on other pages, and planted the book on the table squarely in front of Mrs. Bradley.

“Ah,” said Mrs. Bradley, noting that the letter stated, tersely, that Carn was to die, but that nobody else was to be harmed, “I should very much like to take a copy of this, if I may.”

“And welcome, provided I sign it,” responded the cook. So Mrs. Bradley copied the letter very neatly and beautifully in longhand script, and the cook methodically and painstakingly added what she described as “me usual signature, as on Post Office Bank Book.”

“Bit of a character,” said Bassin, who had regarded these proceedings with great interest. “What is her object, I

wonder, in insisting upon adding her signature to your copy? I suppose she has some idea that you won't be likely to alter the wording, or something, if she's signed it. These people have extremely confused ideas."

Mrs. Bradley poked him in the ribs and cackled.

The cook, who had left them in order to put away her book, returned at this point, and Mrs. Bradley asked her to give them, so far as she could, a complete account of Mr. and Mrs. Carn's movements on the day of Mrs. Carn's death.

"Well," said the cook, "beginning with breakfast, there was omelettes, often a cause of friction, but seldom I'm glad to say, 'ere. Breakfast over, missus tells the master she's sent for Mr. Bassin—that's this gentleman here, and I hope he'll excuse me for making free with his name—and master said it was a pity, he thought, but still she must do as she liked, but for his part he rather thought it would all blow over. 'Should all be allowed to,' was his words, spoke very hang-dog, it seemed to me, the walls being thin."

"And you understood, from this conversation, that they were referring to those anonymous letters, I suppose?"

"Not by a long chalk, no, although it turned out to be so."

"Oh? What did you think they meant?"

"Well, when there's been goings on, and the family lawyer gets sent for, what does it sound like but divorce."

"Divorce?"

"Well, there was him and Mrs. Mention-no-names up the Ridge dilly-dallying enough to make you sick of the Babylonians, and missus, poor soul, knowing all about it, and hoping and hoping for the best, and making excuses for him, till I suppose she got fair sick of it in the end, and sent (as I thought) for the lawyer, to get her a decent settlement. But it wasn't that at all, it turned out, although that's funny, too, because he sounded kind of what I call hang-dog, and he'd been all of a to-do about the letters."

"But are you sure," said Bassin, "that Mrs. Carn knew about her husband and Mrs. Saxant?"

"Of course she knew, although I don't think for long, poor soul. I know when she knew, what's more. It was when that long-faced German, Mr. Saxant's friend, came here to tea one afternoon. I bet he told her. Radiant as a rose she was when he came, and when he went she said—I heard her myself—hanging about to get orders how many covers to lay for dinner, there being nobody in this house you can trust on a message: 'Oh, dear, Mr. Senss!' she says. 'I'm sorry to hear you say that. I never dreamt—of course, one does hear things,' she said, 'but—oh, dear, I wish you hadn't told me. I shan't sleep a wink,' she says. 'It's horrible! I never would have believed it, although one knows what men can be like,' she says, nearly crying, and no wonder, poor soul. Well I remember my—"

"Cook," said Bassin, breaking in again, "when I visited the house, did you hear Ethel let me in?"

"Yes, sir, I did, the stairs to the kitchen being where they are."

"Can you remember what she said? I've been trying to convey to Mrs. Bradley the extreme urgency of her remarks, but I find I can't quite recollect them."

"She said, as near as I remember: 'Oh, sir, we are so pleased to see you! Excuse me; I'll run and tell them.'"

"Ah, I remember now," said Bassin. "Those were her very words."

"I can usually remember words, like," the cook responded. "Verbal memory, they call it. I depend on it quite a lot; you'd be surprised."

"Really? Well, now, this very important day. Breakfast over, what was the next move?"

"Master went to the library, as usual, missus finished the orders and then went into the morning-room and wrote letters. Lunch was to be at one, when out bounces master, at barely ten to, and says: 'Damn it, damn it, I shall be late

for that damned, confounded lecture'—although, as my witness is above, not a word had been said about having lunch put early, as it could have been, easy enough, if only folks would make up their mind when they want it, and, anyway, when Ethel came to serve, there was only missus to serve to, and her looking flushed and flustered, but getting over it soon, so Ethel says, just like the lady she was—real gentry, not like master—and then the next thing worth mentioning, Mr. Bassin, he came, didn't you? Then we see him leave the house, but noted he never took the briefcase he had had in his hand to come with, so thought he was coming back, and then the hullabaloo, and missus there lying on the floor. Such an upset after that, and Mr. Bassin coming back again, and taking all on himself in a way that was a comfort to one and all, I'm sure, sir, and then, of course, master crawling home in the evening and not here to breakfast in the morning."

"Oh? Then you don't know at what time your master left the house, never to return to it again?"

"No idea, none of us haven't. He came, and he stared, like somebody insane, when the doctor told him what had happened. Then he sat down, and put his head in his hands, just like I said at the inquest, and goodness me, that was a day, that was, and me never liking to be public, and then him and the doctor had some whisky, and the doctor broke it to him as he'd have to talk to the police first thing in the morning—as had been waiting and waiting all afternoon and evening, I might tell you, eating and drinking round the kitchen—to get a statement from him, and then the doctor, he left, and the girls, that had had hysterics, was all for packing their boxes and going too, because they said in the night we'd all be murdered, but there wasn't no trains, and no one to carry their suitcases, so we all lumped in together with the rolling-pins and the fire-irons and a few texts Gertie had, being religious, and saw the night out together, although I'll swear I never slept a wink.

“But where master got to was a lick. He came back, and he went away again, and that’s all I can tell you—or anybody else, for that matter. Found him dead it surprised me. My private idea was he was to blame for missus, him being so lah-di-dah about the lunch, it sounded like nerves to me. But it seems it couldn’t have been.”

“When did you first discover that he was missing?”

“At breakfast, the morning after. It’s nobody’s job to call him. He just gets up. When he wasn’t down to about his usual time we says to ourselves he was overcome, and hadn’t been able to sleep all night, and perhaps had dropped off in the morning, you know the way you do. But when it came twelve o’clock I says to Ethel: ‘I reckon somebody ought to peep in,’ I says, ‘and see if he’s quite all right. He might have a brain fever, or anything else,’ I said, ‘on top of a shock like that.’”

“You didn’t think, at that time, then, that Mr. Carn had murdered Mrs. Carn, did you?” Bassin enquired.

“I don’t know what I thought. I don’t know *as* I thought. It was afterwards things come home, as you might say. Well, of course, he wasn’t in his bed, and his bed had not been slept in. After that it was nothing but p’lice, p’lice, p’lice. The fair sight of a blue uniform makes me feel ill these days.”

“A vivid narration,” said Mrs. Bradley, as they were driving home.

“Did you notice that the words Mrs. Carn addressed to Kurt Senss would have done equally well if he’d been telling some of the horrors of Nazi persecution?” asked Bassin.

“Yes, that came out very clearly. But the ‘hang-dog’ remarks of Mr. Carn about things being allowed to blow over must, I think, have referred to himself and Mrs. Saxant.”

“What interested me,” said Carey, “was the point made by the servant girl, that the trouble seemed to break loose after the appearance of Bassin. I thought that was rather significant.”

"It was very significant indeed," said Mrs. Bradley, "because the whole evidence, taken together, points clearly to Carn's guilt."

"So the police were right after all," said Carey. "Pretty good."

"They are usually right," said Bassin. "But now, you see, we get Carn's death mucking things up."

"Yes, and Carn's death is mysterious, fantastic, and incredible," said Mrs. Bradley, "and brings us back to a further consideration of the letters and the corrected proofs, I feel."

"What about going to Saxant at the printing works tomorrow morning, and *demanding* a copy of the book?"

"We could try. Mr. Bassin is the one of us from whom the demand could reasonably come."

"I'd like to see how Senss reacts to the information that the incendiary was the little German," said Carey.

"I don't suppose the information would be news to him, and I doubt whether we shall find Mr. Senss at the printing press. Mr. Saxant, too, may be absent. We shall see."

"Meanwhile," said Bassin, smiling, "we are seeing the countryside from a very fine car, and are meeting a lot of nice people."

"The cook was a gem," said Carey. "Good face, too. I must paint her when all this is settled."

Among the nice people they were meeting they did not, next morning, number Geoffrey Saxant or Kurt Senss. The office boy, not chewing gum for the excellent although simple reason that he had at that moment parked it on the back of his neck underneath his soft collar, admitted them, but could offer no information as to when they might expect to be able to interview either of the partners. The fire, Mrs. Bradley observed, had done surprisingly little damage to the premises.

"Said they were having a long week-end," said the youth, for the fifth time, as his visitors prepared to depart.

He watched them all the way up the alley before he left his post at the window. Then he retrieved the chewing-gum with a slight yelp of pain, because it had been in position long enough to have adhered fairly firmly to his skin, seated himself, put his feet up on the table and took out and counted the three pound and four ten-shilling notes which had been sent to his home by registered post that morning. With them there was a note of a different kind. It was written in a foreign hand on thin, yellow paper with a Frankfurt watermark.

"You must try again as soon as you can," it read. "Twenty-five pounds for success in this simple enterprise. Remember that I blow every gaff if you betray me to your employers."

"Sez you," observed the youth, stowing away his treasure and taking out a threepenny blood. Carey, who had reentered the premises by way of the broken window at the rear, found little difficulty in obtaining possession of the envelope and its contents. He handed the money back, but impounded the letter and the envelope.

"Exhibit A," he pronounced, letting the youth get up.

"Sez you," observed the youth, whose vocabulary seemed to be limited.

• CHAPTER 8 •

The Nudist Sanctuary

“... we have seen strange things to-day, but stranger still remain.”

• 1 •

“Another visit to Mrs. Saxant is indicated, I suppose,” said Bassin.

“Oh, lor!” said Carey, who did not like her very much. This opinion seemed to be shared by his aunt, who announced that she was not going to visit Mrs. Saxant that afternoon, but proposed to combine business with pleasure and see whether she could obtain permission to carry out an experiment in psychoanalysis at a large nudist colony which she understood existed in the neighbourhood.

“Nothing to do with the murders?” Carey enquired.

“Time alone will determine that,” she replied, with a hearty cackle.

“Well, I think *I’d* better call on Mrs. Saxant,” said Bassin. “I’ll let you both know how I get on.”

“And I,” said Carey, “am going to dig out Mr. Simplon and find out what he thinks he’s up to, setting fire to Saxant’s printing press.”

Bassin had been visited by one of those simple, profound ideas which always seem exciting, and often

sustain the touchstone of being put actually to the test. He returned to the “Lion” with the others, changed his collar, took the uncorrected proofs out of the drawer, and carried them with him to the House on the Ridge.

Here, as he had supposed would be the case, he found Geoffrey Saxant. The senior partner was in a deck-chair smoking a pipe. He was looking at a magazine, flipping the pages idly, and lacking interest, it seemed, in his occupation; for he looked up the moment that Bassin began to walk across the lawn, although he could not have heard him.

“Good morning, Mr. Saxant,” said Bassin. “My name’s Bassin, of Bassin, Lillibud and Bassin, solicitors to the late Fortinbras Carn. Don’t get up, sir, please. I’ve come over to know whether you’d do me a favour.”

“With pleasure,” Geoffrey Saxant, a large man with a luxuriant moustache and piercing eyes—the whole face and embellishments singularly reminiscent, Bassin thought, of the late Lord Kitchener, of whom he had seen several photographs—got up out of the deck-chair ponderously and with unusual care, and, nipping the creases of his elegant trousers between finger and thumb, waggled them into shape before bestowing his full attention upon his visitor.

“It’s like this,” Bassin said. “Our late client, as you know, was expecting to have a book come out from your press, a thing called—”

“*The Open-Bellied Mountain*. Quite right. He was.”

“He never suggested to you that the order might be cancelled?”

“Good lord, no! He was fearfully keen on the thing. Talked about making it a bestseller. Under pressure from Senss, I always thought, although nothing was ever said about that to me.”

“Your partner did not want to print the book? He would have preferred to have another firm handle it?”

“Oh, Senss didn’t mind the book. His idea was to buy the copyright, and run off thirty thousand of the thing. Absolute nonsense, with the kind of plant we’ve got, and so I told him. Lyle’s might tackle it; they’re a commercial firm; but my little press is my hobby, and I was damned if I could see any point in our trying to print a bestseller of sorts, as Senss suggested. Besides, in my opinion, the thing was filthy. I said—and I still maintain that I was right—that we undertook to print a hundred copies merely to oblige Carn, and that if he weren’t satisfied he could cancel his order and indemnify us as to costs. Quite simple and quite straightforward.”

“Yes, certainly,” said Bassin, beginning to feel a degree of sympathy for Mrs. Saxant which he had not supposed that that loving lady’s circumstances would ever have had power to extort from him. “What happened, then, about the cancelled order?”

“Well, that’s so odd, you know. Fellow was dead keen on the book. Thought it a great work. Of course, so it was, in a sense. Magnificently written. Then his wife—nice woman, that; too good for an oaf like Carn—fellow was an artist but no gentleman—very seldom the two things do go together—did all his typing, too. Shouldn’t have cared for my wife to type a thing like that. Remember Caliban? ‘You taught me language, and my profit on’t is I know how to curse.’ Or words to that effect. Quotation not my strong point.”

“Look here, Mr. Saxant,” said Bassin. “You know Carn’s signature, I take it?”

“Pretty well. There was the devil of a lot of correspondence over this beastly book. Personally, I wish we’d never touched it, commission or no commission. It wasn’t worth it.”

“Well, what do you think about that cancellation order?”

“Phoney, my dear fellow, absolutely phoney. Why should it turn up suddenly like that, just when the book was due to come out? Why, the day before his wife was killed,

Carn was in the office blethering at us about the beastly thing. Mind you, I do recollect one thing. He did ask Senss how much harm would it do us to have such a book under our imprint. Did he think there could possibly be political repercussions? But that anyone ought to be prepared to die in the cause of art. You never heard such a lot of silly rot in all your life."

"But was it such rot? After all, the chap was murdered all right."

"Yes, yes. Yes, he was, by Jove, wasn't he? Damn, I never thought of that. Never connected it, I mean. Jove, yes of course. Well, look here, what do you particularly want to know?"

"First, I want to know whether I can get hold of a printed copy of that book. I've got proofs, but they're an uncorrected set."

"Sorry, my dear chap, no. Senss and I have had some discussion about that. I know you were promised, but we've no authority to supply a copy of that book to anybody but the subscribers, and not even to them now, until we get the OK about that signature on the cancellation order."

"Suppose that the signature is declared to be a forgery, who holds the copyright of the book?"

"You ought to know. You're a lawyer. It would be the author's next of kin, Mr. Thomas Carn, the man at present living in the House by the Brook, I should imagine."

"Yes. Has he read the book, do you happen to know?"

"I don't see how he can have done, unless his brother showed him the manuscript."

"You mean the typescript, don't you?"

"No, no. No, I mean what I say. Carn was an extremely careful man. Every word he wrote went into ordinary longhand, with a fountain pen, before he had anything typed. Then his wife did his typing for him, and from that typescript we set up the book."

“What happens to a typescript when the printers have done with it?”

“It is returned to the author with the proofs.”

“And when the proofs are corrected?”

“Goodness knows. One set of corrected proofs comes back to us, and the author holds on to the other set, but the typescript is of no value.”

“So that somewhere, unless they have been destroyed, there should be a longhand manuscript and a typescript of *The Open-Bellied Mountain*?”

“Presumably. But don’t depend upon being able to make very much of either, my dear fellow. The human being doesn’t live, now Mrs. Carn’s gone, who can decipher Carn’s manuscripts. They are nothing but a mass of corrections, marginal notes, interpolations, alterations, additions, blots, and beer-stains. The typescript is also pretty well scribbled over and corrected by the time we get it. That’s the worst of these stylists. Never satisfied.”

“You can’t remember, I suppose, any obvious alterations, printers’ errors included, which Carn had made when he sent the galleys, can you? I’ve got an uncorrected set of galleys here, if your memory wants any jogging.”

Mr. Saxant, however, with great geniality but even greater firmness, refused to look at the galleys, and observed that at his press no gross printers’ errors were ever made, since he and Senss, both men of education and experience, set up the books themselves, and that, in any case, he was sure he could not remember the author’s own corrections, of which he believed there had been a very large number.

“Yes, but a thing like this, for example,” said Bassin, obstinately. “‘*Bonner*’ for *Donner*; ‘*Dowling*’ for *Bowling*—”

“Mrs. Carn’s typing, I should imagine. We copy the typescript exactly, of course, and then our reader—in this case Senss did the reading—goes through and puts a mark of interrogation in the margin against any doubtful point.”

"I see. Yes, thanks very much. By the way, that German friend of Mr. Senss who visits at your office sometimes—"

"Simplon? He isn't German. I believe he's a Lithuanian. Funny, fierce little chap."

"Yes, that's the man. His name isn't Simplon, is it?"

"I should imagine not. It's probably unpronounceable, so he's simplified it—like that Polish-American sports girl who calls herself Stella Walsh."

"Oh, yes I see."

"Well, I don't know, but I should think it's very likely. I mean, if Simplon's anything, it's French, and the fellow isn't a Frenchman. Odd little cove. Can't quite place him. Very thick with Senss."

"Really?"

"Oh, yes. Sit and gab away in German to one another. Of course, Simplon's not a refugee. He's naturalised. Been over here for years. Well, sorry I can't help you over your proofs. I'll tell you what. If there should be a spare copy when we've bound a hundred—sometimes one or two are not so good, and we discard them—I'll slip one along to you if Senss agrees. Bit awkward we can't get Carn himself to OK it—but then, of course, you wouldn't be needing it if Carn had not been scuppered, what? Well, well, good-bye, my dear fellow. Very pleased you called. Anything I can do to help clear up poor Carn's death. A very good fellow, very, take him on the whole."

A theory that Carn had killed Mrs. Carn because of his admiration for Mrs. Saxant, and that Saxant had retaliated by killing Carn, which had made a neat although unconvincing pattern in Bassin's orderly mind, now resolved itself into its bits and pieces again, kaleidoscopic and as meaningless as before.

Carey had very little luck with Mr. Simplon, and when Mrs. Bradley returned to the inn that evening after she had paid her first visit to the nudists, she found him in the lounge with a large-scale map of the district, and a patient, enduring expression which, in him, she knew, meant boredom.

"Poor child," she said, "wasn't he at home?"

"Oh, yes, he was at home all right, and he admits he hates Senss like poison. I had a bit of a game finding out where he lived, but that office boy of Saxant's told me, in the end. The world will be a better place when somebody wrings that youth's neck. I can't think why Saxant keeps him. Incidentally, there seems to be something odd about the disappearance of Senss. You wouldn't suppose another murder, would you?"

"Oh, dear, I hope not, child. Where's Justus, by the way?"

"Came in and went out again. Gone to see Mabb in quod, I rather think. The poor chap's very down-hearted—Mabb, I mean."

"Yes, I expect he is. Well, we can do nothing for him yet. I know who committed the murders, and I know why they were committed, but I have no proof at all that the law would accept. I am expecting Ferdinand down."

"Oh, heck! When?"

"On Monday. If you wished to avoid meeting him—"

"Well, I do, rather, if you really don't mind."

"Of course not, child. I was about to suggest that you take advantage of the really beautiful weather and join the nudist colony on Ampcommon Hill."

"Do I hear what you say?"

"Yes, child."

"Nudist colony?"

"If you would be so good."

"Why?"

"Well," said his aunt impressively, "I have always thought that if one wanted to hide oneself from the world for a bit in the summer—suppose the police, the bloodhounds, or one's hereditary foes were on one's trail—that a nudist colony would offer a very fair means of walking in the water, as it were, for a month or two, while one considered which was the best of several courses to pursue."

"There's something behind all this. You can't deceive me. Is nudity a condition of entry?"

"Well not of entry, but of residence. I may add that you will see me there—"

"Aunt Adela, no! I forbid it."

"—from time to time. I am doing some work there. The psychology of nudism is interesting. You, being in—"

"See that th' opposed may beware of thee," said Carey, grinning. "They probably will. Me in the buff would cause the stoutest heart to quail. What am I to look out for while I'm there?"

"You might do worse than look out for Fortinbras Carn."

"*What?*" said Carey. "Minus ears and hand? You're not serious, dear old soul?"

"Time alone will show. Remember to wear your sunglasses if the light in the Sanctuary is strong."

"Look here, can't Bassin go?"

"No. Justus might be recognised. He is known."

"But Carn hasn't seen him since he was sixteen."

"It cannot be Justus, dear child."

"All right. Have it your own way. One comfort, I've done a good bit of life-drawing in my time. The human frame has no more surprises for me."

"I shall be there, at times," Mrs. Bradley remarked, "as I have told you. But it would make for the success of our plans if you did not appear to know me. And yet—" She meditated. "No, perhaps, after all—"

"What I can't see," went on Carey, "is how on earth you deduce that Carn may be in the place."

"It is a very good hiding-place, child."

"And you're going to psychoanalyse the sun-worshippers? Well, don't go and spoil the nice clean fun. These people are like vegetarians, remember."

"They *are* vegetarians," Mrs. Bradley pointed out.

"Well, I'll inspect them closely, and try to decide to what extent they've shaved off their beards and moustaches. Is that the idea?"

"Yes, dear child, but keep an open mind."

"The whole function of the artist. Be of good cheer. 'No prejudice' is my middle name, as they say in the wilds of Minnesota."

He yawned, and a little later his aunt had bidden him a sincerely affectionate good night. Then from the deep pocket of her skirt she produced a small revolver and a torch and sat with them in her hands until Bassin returned at midnight. The inn had long since closed its doors, but the lounge door remained on the latch so that he could come in. Mrs. Bradley had promised the servant to lock up after Bassin's return.

"Oh, Justus," she said, when he entered, "do you prefer the revolver or the torch? There's somebody up the chimney."

Bassin was a man not easily discountenanced or surprised. He took the torch, switched it on, and together they approached the enormous fireplace. It had the usual ingle-nook seats, very solid and badly worn, and, during summer, used as bookcases. The wide chimney rose black above the fireplace and whitened hearth, soaring, as it were, into night. By standing inside the curb, on the hearth, or when seated in one of the ingle-nook seats, it was possible, craning upwards, to see the sky.

Bassin and Mrs. Bradley, however, made no attempt to obtain this constricted view of celestial space. Advancing

cautiously, they moved towards the southern, or left-hand end of the fireplace, and then Bassin switched on the torch and aimed its circular beam up into the chimney recesses.

"Come down, and no funny business," he observed. "We've got a gun."

There was no response to the invitation or to the warning. Not a sound disturbed the still house until, with some abruptness, the ancient clock in the lounge cleared its throat and struck twelve. Then the cleft silence rolled together again like cloud, and, after a pause, Bassin murmured:

"Are you sure you saw someone?"

"No, but I heard him. Just after half-past eleven; the clock had scarcely struck."

"Bats, or something do you think?"

"No, it was heavier and more scrambling."

"Let's have another go, then." He advanced a foot nearer, and called upwards.

"Come down. We're going to shoot." Again there was no response. "Don't really want to wake the household," muttered Bassin. He began to explore with the torch. "Can't—oh, by heck, there he is!"

He reached up into the chimney and gave a jerk. The effect was alarming and sudden. Into the chimney opening swung a man, his dangling legs proclaiming that something was supporting him from the neck. Mrs. Bradley put down the revolver and took out a knife.

"Keep the light on him, Justus," she commanded. She picked up a chair, placed it in the fireplace, went over to the switch and lighted up the room. The dangling legs were three feet above the grate.

"All right, I'll do that," said Bassin. He gave her the torch and took the knife. Then he stepped up on the chair, and Mrs. Bradley held the torch high to give him the light to see by.

"Stand clear," said Justus. "Here we come."

The body crashed horribly into the fireplace. They dragged it out on to the floor, and removed the rope from underneath the arms.

“Who is it?” enquired Mrs. Bradley.

“It’s the little German, Simplon. This is a funny business. What do you suppose we do now, besides ‘phone the police? Bloke *is* dead, I presume?”

“Oh, no. He’s not dead. We shall bring him round all right. He’ll be out of action for a week or two, though, I imagine,” said Mrs. Bradley, examining a bump on his head. “We’d better get him to hospital. Ring the police, and ask them to see about an ambulance.”

•3•

“It doesn’t make sense,” said Carey.

“On the contrary, it makes complete sense,” replied his aunt. “What is more, we have gained, through Justus, who is destined, I feel, to go far, some very important and interesting information. There is police news, too, according to the morning paper upon which, I perceive, you are sitting. The police have taken a statement from Mrs. Saxant, in which she declares that Mr. Carn’s ears were pierced for earrings, and—”

“So the police have decided that, in spite of its identification by the younger Carn, the corpse was not, in short, that of Carn? Aunt Adela, you’re a marvel. And now I suppose they’ll discover, when once more they exhume the corpse, that its luxurious hairiness was merely the wilfully misleading hairiness of Jacob, and, in short, that they’ve been sold a pup. I suppose you’ve been on to the chief constable?”

"I was at school with one of his aunts," Mrs. Bradley replied.

"Talk about wax lights and the corpse being discovered in a ditch! But I still can't think what makes you think I shall find Carn at this nudist colony."

"Merely, as I said before, that I cannot think of a better place to hide. One's friends seldom visit one there, and the strictest watch is kept against trespassers. One is assured of perfect privacy. 'The Garden of Eden Pre-Fall Holiday Relaxation and Greek Cultural Physical Recreation Sanctuary' is the full name of the institution. It is, needless to say—"

"Run by an American quack doctor of Puritan New England descent. I know. All right. I'm prepared for anything."

"There's a good boy," said Bassin, joining them. "Well, you were right about our little friend, Mrs. Bradley. He'll pull through. Nasty knock on the head. Hasn't regained consciousness yet, but they say they've had worse cases from the riding school. But what's the idea of it, I wonder? I wonder whether Carey's visit upset him, and this is his idea of retaliation?"

"I was about to tell Carey of your discoveries about the manuscript and the typescript."

"Oh, yes," said Bassin, retailing them. "Funny that neither of us thought of getting at it that way. I think I ought to pursue the thing along those lines at once. They ought to be in the House by the Brook, unless they've been deliberately destroyed. What do you think, Lestrangle?"

"Absolutely. I wish I could come with you. I'm funkng this nudist stuff."

"One on a job like this is probably better than two," said Bassin reasonably. "I mean, where one can worm his way in with a certain amount of success, two would arouse suspicion."

Carey, putting his toothbrush into his pocket, and observing gloomily that he supposed it was the only thing he would need, and that if he chewed enough bones he supposed he wouldn't need that, took a pathetic farewell of his aunt, reminded her that he was a married man with a child, and, in broken accents (much appreciated by George, seated impassively in the driver's seat of Mrs. Bradley's car), besought her never to tell his mother what he was proposing to do. The effect of all this passionate pleading was slightly marred by the fact that he was obviously looking forward with some amusement to the experience.

The nudist colony existed on the slopes of a forested hill. Why forestry should be deemed an indispensable adjunct to nudism had never been clear to him, Carey observed, as they approached the entrance to the Sanctuary. In fact, he confided to Mrs. Bradley, to come upon people suddenly from behind trees would be, he felt, a shock from which he would take years to recover.

The car dropped down into deep lanes between hedges perched on steep banks, then climbed abrupt slopes between the forest trees and soon reached gates set slantwise off the road.

At this evidence that they had reached, at any rate, the outskirts of their destination, Carey moaned feebly and closed his eyes. Mrs. Bradley poked him, and told him to sit up and look pleasant.

"They are expecting us, child," she said.

"Don't. I feel sick and bad," said her nephew feebly. "What a horribly callous old party you are. Does your kith and kin mean nothing to you at all? What do you suppose my lamentable Aunt Selina will have to say to all this? And young Sally Lestrangle? She'll scream her head off. In fact, they both will, only in different ways."

"It is all means to an end, child. Nobody understands the moral significance of such a policy better than your Aunt Selina."

“First catty thing I’ve ever heard you say,” observed her nephew, with relish. “But, O my Lord, what a morning!”

As he spoke, the car, which had been gliding around serpentine curves of a mossy, grass-grown drive, now came to a standstill beneath the benign, grey branches of a beech tree. A gentleman in formal morning dress, except that he was bareheaded, came forward from a kind of garden shelter close at hand. From the car the occupants could also see patches of lawn surrounded by rhododendron bushes, and, beyond the immediate terrain, the top half of the facade of a large house.

“Welcome, strangers,” said the gentleman, in a pronounced American accent of, Mrs. Bradley rather thought, the Bronx district of New York. “We are sure glad to see you.”

Carey felt that he could not, with any marked sincerity, return the compliment, but sat back in the car, gazing with fascinated horror at the gentleman’s companions, one of whom was a human being and the other a chimpanzee. They were holding hands, and, of the two, the ape appeared to better advantage than the human being, for not only had he an intelligent face and an impressively muscular body, but he was without the disadvantage of having to pretend that he did not know that he was naked.

The young man, with his companion and (as the frock-coated American gentleman not too happily expressed it) blood-brother, approached the car.

“These two—Childe Roland sure is Mr. Shoot’s second self; you couldn’t separate them without they would just bleed silently to death in their hearts—yes, sir—are to be your hut comrades and chain fellow, fellowship, devoted, freelance, ethical companions,” the gentleman continued, smiling.

“Therefore,” said Mr. Shoot, in a tired voice, “if you will trouble yourself to descend from your automobile, Mr. Lestranger, I will, of course, show you our way of doing

things. No doubt, to accustom yourself, you will prefer to retain your bathing trunks, just to break the ice, as we say, but that can only be permitted for the first two days. Most people," he added encouragingly, as the American gentleman, opening the door of the car, watched Carey step out as though he were watching the antics of his infant son, "discard them in one day, and our record case—of which we are very proud—"

"Came clean," interposed the American cheerily, "after one half-hour. Yes, *sir*."

Carey muttered, and, turning to his aunt, rolled his eyes horribly at her before bidding her a broken-voiced farewell. The young man (who had the aloof, goat-like expression of the highbrow who does not publish because he does not write for the vulgar), assisted ably by the ape, which offered Carey its leather-coated palm to hold, took the new arrival in hand and led him towards the very heart of the Sanctuary.

"Nice day," said Carey. The ape squeezed his hand, but ambled purposefully onwards without turning its head. Mr. Shoot did not take even this much notice of the sound of his human companion's voice, but, with brows knit in stern nobility and stomach conscientiously drawn in, walked with the ungraceful carefulness of a man who has stubbed his bare toes before and feels pretty sure that he will shortly stub them again.

After a walk of about a quarter of an hour, they were through the rhododendron bushes and had come out upon a stretch of uninterrupted grassland in the centre of which was a pond. Several of the nudists were bathing. All, so far as Carey could make out at that distance—some forty yards—were of indifferent physique, and many of the men were bearded. They gave up their pursuit of health, cleanliness, and pleasure as soon as he drew near, and stared seriously at him as though to make sure that when he became one of them, they would be able to recognise him again. Carey grinned amiably at the younger men, and, accustomed to

years of life-drawing at art schools, summed up all the women in sight as, frankly, uninteresting. The younger men smiled politely. Among most of the women and some of the men there was the peculiar self-consciousness he had already noticed in Mr. Shoot. This, it was obvious, was not because of the fact of their nakedness, as such, but because they were uncomfortably aware that their naked bodies showed undisguisable faults of figure and of posture.

Mr. Shoot touched Carey's arm.

"Come along," he said, wearily. So they passed on over the greensward, Carey feeling like the hero of some ridiculous Pilgrim's Progress, and through a gap in a low-cut privet hedge behind which there was a lane, a higher hedge, trees, a clearing, and a hut.

"Here we are," said Mr. Shoot. The ape loosed Carey's hand and suddenly swung itself up by a branch to the roof of the hut, where it seated itself. From this position it leered mately, and made a few remarks of what appeared to be a personal nature. It then caught a flea, which it held between finger and thumb and gently admonished.

Mr. Shoot urged Carey into the hut, and then seemed struck by the fact that the new arrival had no luggage with him.

"I say, you know. Your bags, you know," he said.

"I know. I'll soon have them off," said Carey soothingly.

"No, no. Your baggage. Your kit. Your suitcase and whatnot. I mean, what?"

"Kit?" said Carey blankly. "I've got my toothbrush and my shaving things. What the devil else should I want?"

He went irritably into the hut, cast off his shirt, trousers, and underwear, kicked off his shoes, dragged off his socks, dribbled the whole lot into an untidy but smallish heap in a corner, and walked out into the light of day.

"Do you get mosquitoes here?" he enquired.

"I say, you know, what?" said the apparently highly gratified Mr. Shoot. "I say, you know, stick to it, you know,

and you hold the record, what? Oh, well played, sir," he concluded, on a still mournful, but obviously congratulatory note. "Oh, I say, the Leader *will* be pleased."

He stepped a pace or two away, and subjected his companion to keen scrutiny.

Mrs. Bradley had not seen her nephew without his clothes since he was a tiny child. Coming up now, with the frock-coated American gentleman, she congratulated him sedately upon his appearance, which, indeed, was considerably more pleasing in its lean and graceful strength than that of most of those people she had seen as she passed by the pool and through the grounds, and, turning, remarked to her escort:

"A pity *all* young people don't come here in the summer. What is your average attendance?"

"Oh, it depends upon the weather and upon politics, what?" said Mr. Shoot, forestalling the American, who was prepared to give a reasoned, statistical reply. Mrs. Bradley said absently that it was very interesting, and that she hoped the beds were aired, and then, to Carey's relief, she departed in the wake of her guide to visit the sunray parlour, the special foam and brine baths, and the married quarters.

"But what happens if passion or lust should eclipse their gentlemanly feelings?" Carey heard her enquiring, from the distance of twenty yards, in her beautiful, deep voice.

"We find," the morning-coated gentleman boomed in reply, "the nude female figure to hold no glamour whatever for the nude male. Therefore we get no petting, and without petting, well, you lose the last tickle of the cat's whiskers, *I'll* say, and where are you then? Still moral, I opine." Mrs. Bradley said that she did not know enough about the subject to subscribe to, or disagree with, this opinion, and an interesting conversation passed beyond earshot of Carey, who picked up a fir-cone and tossed it up at the chimpanzee, who—one could scarcely withhold the pronoun

from so kindly and intelligent a creature—thereupon scrambled from the roof with great agility, took Carey's hand, and led him to the open field on which a game of leap-frog was in progress.

Here Carey was greeted with a mild but genuine cheer. No fewer than five persons, three male and two female, informed him that he was now the holder of the Sanctuary record. Two others obligingly offered to make a back for him to leap over, three more asked him whether he could swim, an old, stout gentleman in sun-glasses and a pair of tennis shoes asked him his opinion on Malthus, and a middle-aged woman with a bad skin invited his views on Ruskin, vegetarianism, *The Soul's Awakening* and Disraeli's novels. Altogether he was made to feel thoroughly welcome and at home.

• CHAPTER 9 •

The Written Word Remains

*“‘This shall not end so,’ cried Sir Moder de la Dart;
‘now have I lost a noble knight of my own blood, and
for this despite and shame I will be revenged to the
uttermost.’”*

As he walked along the church path beside the brook, Bassin was vividly reminded of his swift walk, by the same path, to the house on the day of Mrs. Carn's death. The day was younger, for it had been afternoon, and he had lunched on the train, on the previous occasion. Now it was barely ten o'clock, and there were fewer nursemaids although just as many children. The way seemed longer than it had done on his first visit, and this seemed to him curious, because by this time he well knew the way, and where to find the house. His schoolboy visit had left no impressions of time, distance, and locality on his mind, but he remembered now, very vividly, the white gates and their bridges, the tethered lamb, the hustling, weed-fringed waters of the brook; and yet the way seemed long.

The house looked exactly the same. He did not know what differences he had anticipated, for it was not as though this were the first time he had visited the house since Mrs. Carn's death, and yet it gave him a feeling of surprise that the smooth lawn should be just as green and kempt as before, the brook wall be as neat, the trim garden as formal and pleasant, the house as mellow and familiar.

He crossed the bridge and experienced a sudden nervousness in approaching the quiet house. He would not go up to the French window (now mended) through which he had seen the body, and nobody this time was in the garden to save his applying at the house, so he walked steadily to the broad Queen Anne front door and knocked, although his heart was knocking too—knocking against his ribs with a fear which he would not acknowledge.

The same girl opened the door. Her eyes opened wide at the sight of him, and this time they held no welcome.

“Oh, sir! It’s you!” she said. Leaving the door open she ran back into the house, and Justus could hear her voice, raised high with excitement. Then a man came striding to the door, and Bassin recognised the younger Mr. Carn, who greeted him noisily and nervously.

“Ah, come in, Bassin,” he said. “You’re the image of your father, you really are. I’d know you anywhere. You’ve heard of this foolery the police are up to now? Fortinbras isn’t dead; he murdered Myra, and he’s in hiding somewhere, having chopped off a hand and cut off the ears of a corpse! Did you ever hear such a story?”

He led the way along the passage, talking as he went, and opened the door of a room in whose entrance Bassin instinctively drew back.

“Come in, my boy, come in,” his host exclaimed. Bassin, shrugging off the clammy fingers of fear, went in and shut the door behind him. Yes, it was just the same. It was the room in which he had been told all about those stupid anonymous letters whose threats had been so drastically fulfilled. It was the room from which he had gone out to telegraph to his father not to expect him home that night. It was the room into which he had peered—attracted by the smashed window, visible from the gate. It was the room in which he had seen Mrs. Carn’s dead body, the blood clotted dark on her brow.

It had not been so bad to come to the house with Carey; to interview the kindly but highly individual cook; to talk the thing over as though it were simply a puzzle to be solved; but to come alone, and to sit in the room was horrible. He looked up, conscious of scrutiny, and realised that his host's pale eyes were watching him keenly.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I was thinking. I was with Mrs. Carn, you know, the day that she was killed."

"Oh, yes, you've come about that again, of course," said Thomas Carn.—"As cheerily as though I were the vicar come for an annual subscription to some charity," thought Bassin, waking up to the fact that he strongly disliked Carn's brother.

"If you've no objection, yes. We're on the verge of important discoveries, but can't get any farther because we can't get a copy of the book," he said, meeting the eyes.

"The book?"

"It all hinges on that. Must do. You remember that the anonymous letters suggesting that your brother would do better not to have his book printed, and the set of corrected galleys in Mrs. Carn's possession, were probably the motives for the crime. The murderer scooped them up and made off, and, with the exception of a child and a half-wit at the farm next door, nobody seems to have seen him."

"Quite a likely thing, here. He'd only need to have a car waiting opposite the church, and he could hop in with the letters and proofs and things, and be off in ten seconds without anybody being the wiser."

"I'd never thought of a car by the church," said Bassin, "until—"

"My dear fellow, nothing easier. Come outside, and I'll show you."

Although he could not see that anything was to be gained by doing so, Bassin followed his host through the French windows on to the lawn and so to the bridge. This they crossed, and proceeded past the farm and on to a

broader path capable of taking a car. The church was less than a dozen yards away.

"There you are! That's the way he escaped," said Thomas Carn. Less exuberantly, he led the way back to the house. "What do you want with me now?" he asked, in much less friendly tones. Bassin, seeing no reason against it, told him.

"That manuscript and that typescript are somewhere in this house. I want them found and handed over," he said.

"But the man who took the letters and galleys has probably taken those, too," Thomas Carn began to argue. Bassin, who had been primed by Mrs. Bradley, cut him short.

"He did not remember that they existed. I'm pretty sure of that. Will you look for them, or shall I?"

"Neither of us, my dear fellow. What are servants for?"

He rang the bell, and Bassin explained to the maid what it was they required.

"Oh, sir, the two-year room be what you want," she said.

"The two-year room?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Mr. Carn was very careful to put his finished work up there, to be kept for just two years. Missus had the seeing over it. Every week she would go up there, and take out and destroy the work that was two years old, no matter what it was."

"I see. A useful idea. Go to it, Bassin," said Thomas Carn, with simulated enthusiasm.

"May I? Thanks very much. Lead on, Ethel. This is where we find a jumping-off place, unless I'm greatly mistaken."

He was not mistaken. A short but careful search, during which he discovered notes, schemes of work, a short study entitled *Reformation of a Typical Casual*, brought him at last the manuscript and typescript of the book. They were clipped together, and dated in broad blue pencil.

“Well, attaboy!” said young Mr. Bassin, well pleased. He returned to the “Lion” with his treasure, locked it in his case in his bedroom, locked his bedroom door, came down, and ordered a drink, and prepared, with what patience he could, to await the return of Mrs. Bradley.

She came back amused. Bassin grinned in sympathy with her snapping black eyes, and her smile (like that of a basking alligator), and enquired how Carey fared.

“He has broken the Sanctuary record,” his aunt replied. “It took the last record-holder half an hour to cast care and his lendings to the winds, but Carey managed to adopt the stark principles of nudism immediately he was given a hut in which to undress.”

“They’ll have to introduce strip-tease,” said Bassin, much impressed by Carey’s heroism. “And what about Carn?”

“I haven’t seen him, so far as I know,” Mrs. Bradley cautiously replied, “but that means nothing. I shall leave his unmasking to Carey. What of your own adventures, child?”

“I’ve done pretty well. Better, in fact, than one had hoped. What do you think—oh, well, look here, what with people in chimneys and so forth—would you mind coming up to my room?”

He locked the door upon them both, and then produced the manuscript and the typescript.

“And it’s my opinion—probably worthless, but I’d better tell you—that Thomas Carn wasn’t too keen to brass up. Ask me, that man’s a villain. I don’t say of the deepest dye. Hasn’t enough pluck for that, I’d imagine. But there’s no doubt his heart is not in the right place. Nasty chap. Come in for his brother’s property, and jolly well means to stick to it.”

“Interesting, child. These things sometimes run in families.”

“What, hearts not in the right place, and nasty chaps? I agree. Also, luckily, vice versa. Well, here’s the stuff. Will

you take a slant at it now, or shall I decant it on to you for a season?"

"Let us admire it together. Where are the galleys?"

"Here we are. Here's the whole lot. Now a spot of careful comparison is the idea, I take it. Let's shove our heads close together, and see what we can spot."

In a comradely manner they sat cheek by jowl and pored over all three copies. Each had a pencil, and, without speaking, underlined everything which did not tally on all three scripts.

Time wore on. Bassin became exceedingly hungry, but did not (in view of Mrs. Bradley's concentration of effort) care to mention the fact. At last, after several hours' steady work, they had finished. Bassin pushed hair from his brow, sighed, took out his pipe, glanced at his companion, put it away again and said persuasively:

"Just about dinner-time, don't you think? Wonder what they're giving Carey to eat? Nut foods and orange juice, I expect."

"My poor child!" said Mrs. Bradley in contrite tones.

"You must be starved! Let us lock the door and go down at once."

They dined together and Mrs. Bradley chose the wines. A bucolic clod of a waiter noted the numbers on his cuff, bowed awkwardly, and went off to get the selected bottles. When he had gone, Mrs. Bradley said:

"Will you trust me tonight with the fruit of our combined labours?"

"Yes, rather, but I'm coming in with you."

"You must promise to go to bed, then, child. If I am set upon, I will promise, on my part, to scream loud enough to wake our friend Alfred."

Alfred returned at this moment to say that the wines would be "up" in a minute, and would they take fish?

"I think not, Alfred," said Mrs. Bradley, with kindly firmness, "although I'm sure it's really very nice. Alfred, is

there a priest's hole in this house?"

"No, madam, but there's the fireplace room where King Charles hid, they do say."

"How do you get to it?"

"Through that there bedroom of your, that's how. But don't ee go trying of it. Break your neck, most likely. Ask *me*," said Alfred, leaning heavily on the table and breathing hard, "that's how that German gentleman got hung up in the chimney. Just fools about, they do."

"Not in my bedroom, Alfred, I hope and trust."

"As to that there, well—" said Alfred ponderously. He broke off what appeared to be the commencement of a set of moral reflections, to go to the door and bring the wine in. "Want 'em *both* uncorked, sir? Right you are. One each, is it, or did ee mean to mix, 'em? Ee needn't drink it all if ee don't want it. Easy write the room numbers on they bottles."

When dinner was over, Bassin remarked that he supposed his room would be better than Mrs. Bradley's own, if she intended to keep an all-night vigil. His room was in the newest wing of the house, which had been added in 1760. They went to it, and whilst Bassin prepared to go to bed, and then bounced in and almost immediately fell asleep, Mrs. Bradley, comfortably seated at the dressing table (which had plenty of knee-room) in a chair which was the right height, spread out the results of their research work, and laboured on it patiently until about four o'clock.

When she was certain that nothing more which she could do would add to their knowledge of the author's apparent intentions, opinions and foibles, she took off her skirt and her shoes, locked away the scripts in Bassin's suitcase, crept into bed beside that good young man, who was tall and thin and was lying in the convenient shape of an arc from crown to knees, and fell asleep, too.

Nothing disturbed the rest of either sleeper. At half-past six Bassin awoke, raised himself slightly and put an arm, son-like, over his sleeping companion.

"What news?" he asked her, an hour later, when both had risen and were ready to go down to an early breakfast.

Mrs. Bradley, who had just returned from her own room, where nothing, it was clear, had been disturbed during the night, wagged her head, and said that they would need to obtain a copy of the book in printed form before all their problems would be solved.

"But you've some ideas," said Bassin. "Let's go for a good long walk and talk them over. We can sit in the middle of the great open spaces—what about Banner Down?—where no one can overhear us, or leap on us, or anything—and there you can spill the beans."

Mrs. Bradley assented to this eminently practical suggestion, wondered what Carey was doing, hoped the weather would remain warm and fair, and led the way down the stairs.

After breakfast they met in the lounge burdened with the obvious impedimenta of camera, novels, illustrated papers, and tweed coats, and got into Mrs. Bradley's car.

George parked in a small, turf-covered patch surrounded by bracken, not on Banner Down, but forty miles farther on where hills came down in steep cliffs to the sea.

"Lovely spot," said Bassin. "George, just toot a bit if strangers, or, worse still, people we know, come in sight. Now then, Mrs. Bradley, what about the *b's* and *d's*?"

"Some of the book," said Mrs. Bradley, "has been translated from the German. I think Mrs. Carn did the translation because she reads alternatively *body* for *song* and *brother* for *on the other side*. No doubt her husband corrected these errors on the proof which we have not seen."

"I see, yes. *Leib* for *lied*, and *bruder* for *druden*. But presumably she knew German. Would she have made such mistakes by accident?"

"If she really did not distinguish *b's* and *d's* I think she would. Then she wrote *leather* where the sense would

appear to suggest *to* live, and, of course, apart from these errors in translation, *Tom Dowling* instead of *Tom Bowling* is particularly obvious.”

“*Leben* and *leder*, yes. I suppose it *was* Mrs. Carn, and not Carn himself, who confused the two letters?”

“I think so, because we noticed, in the manuscript, which you also brought from the House by the Brook, that there was no trace, before it was typed, of any confusion of the letters. He wrote ‘babble’ and ‘rid’ without alterations—”

“Yes, but wouldn’t he have corrected his own typescript before it went to the printers?”

“Yes, we saw that he did. He corrected ‘bitch’ to ‘ditch’ in one place, and ‘bib’ to ‘did’ in another, and ‘curd’ to ‘curb’ and ‘peddle’ to ‘pebble.’ No, I think we can take it for granted that it was Mrs. Carn who confused the two letters, and Carn who corrected the error *whenever he detected it*. But he doesn’t appear to have bothered too much with the typescript.”

“What do you mean? Wouldn’t he know she had the slight kink of always mixing the letters up, and take special care to put the mistake right?”

“Yes, child.” She regarded him with the soulless intelligence of a bird. “That’s why we are going to be able to find out Mrs. Carn’s murderer.”

“But we know her murderer.”

“Do we?”

“Carn himself.”

“Yes, but why should he murder his wife?”

“Why shouldn’t he?”

“They were fond of one another—”

“She knew about his affair with Mrs. Saxant.”

“Men don’t usually murder wives who find out that kind of thing.”

“Still, it has been done.”

“But, the most interesting error,” continued Mrs. Bradley, “is not on the typescript.”

"What?"

"The 'Donner-Bonner' error is not on the typescript, child."

"Good heavens! That's rather odd."

"It is delightfully odd. In fact, it is the nucleus of our case against Mrs. Carn's murderer, because Carn *had actually corrected that same error* on the typescript. This afternoon I shall go and see Carey, and find out what he has to report."

"I say, it *is* all a bit unfathomable, you know."

"Yes. Child, I want you to go back to London at once with a message to your father."

"Post it, Mrs. Bradley. I'm not going back to London now. 'The hunt is up, the hunt is up, and it is well-nigh day.'"

"Yes, the hunt is up," Mrs. Bradley replied, "and that's why I want you to go back to London immediately."

As she spoke, George, who had been standing about twenty yards away on a boulder, as though he were admiring the view, began to stroll towards them.

"Somebody coming," said Mrs. Bradley placidly.

"Two men, a dog, two young ladies, and a bearded gentleman, madam," observed George, "are in the close vicinity."

"Very good, George. We're ready," replied his employer. "Give the bearded gentleman a wide berth. I have my suspicions of beards in a place like this."

George took his place at the wheel, and as he did so there was the echoing sound of a shot, a scream from one of the girls who had just come in sight, and a yell of annoyance from George, who brought the car round and gave chase to the bearded man.

"Obey orders, George, you insubordinate rascal," said Mrs. Bradley. "This is not a punitive raid. Get Mr. Bassin away from here. He is the target, not you."

"I beg your pardon, madam," said George, slewing round and leaving the valley at the rate of fifty miles an

hour on a road just wide enough to take the width of the car. "It was the bearded gentleman, madam. He's on a Brough Superior. I didn't get the number. His mackintosh was hung over."

"He has made off at a pretty good bat, anyway," said Bassin. "Why the devil should he take a pop at me? And who is he, anyway?"

"The beard is an obvious, but, at a distance, a remarkably efficient disguise," Mrs. Bradley remarked.

"Yes, but you know who he is."

"I can guess, child, but we have no proof."

"If we could have got his number, that would be proof."

"Not if he had hired the motor cycle in a name not his own, and not in the place where he lives."

"The number plates would have been enough for the police, I'm perfectly sure."

"I don't want the police in yet, child."

"No," Bassin agreed. "Not much point in having anybody arrested for taking unsuccessful pot-shots at us, I suppose. What's the next move?"

"We ought to tabulate our facts, balance them against any theories we may hold and—"

"See who the cap fits. I get it. And now, I am in the mood for fun of the lowlier kind. George, drive in to Applebury. I require tomatoes."

He was some time in choosing, feeling every tomato carefully, and selecting only those which were completely ripe.

"Are these the worst you have?" he enquired of the girl who was serving.

"Except the throw-outs. You can have them if you want them, I suppose."

"Don't sell 'em, Lally," said a man from the interior of the dark little shop. "It's a dick's dirty trick, I bet."

"No, I assure you," said Bassin. "But I don't care for tomatoes unless they burst on the face."

“The over-ripe tomato is rated too highly as a weapon, or as an expression of opinion,” Mrs. Bradley remarked. “It is apt to scatter its properties in transit, and this detracts from the result when it reaches its target. Those which you have selected are excellent for your purpose, child. Get them weighed, and come along, or you will be too late.”

So, two minds with but a single thought (albeit one of which Mrs. Bradley, in essence, disapproved), but not two hearts that beat as one, since the young man was keyed up to a state of pleased anticipation which his companion did not share, they sped back to the place at which the shots had been fired, and, by diligent enquiry, were able to trace the route by which the bearded motor cyclist had returned to civilisation. They were lucky enough to catch up with him, for George, who, owing to the prejudices of his employer, enjoyed few opportunities of testing to the full the capabilities of the car, drove at seventy miles an hour for most of the way, and, by dexterous manipulation of the wheel, avoided tedious halts in towns. They encountered only once traffic lights, which were against them, and picked up the bearded terrorist at the end of a long, built-up area.

He was seated at the roadside tinkering with his conveyance's inside. George, previously instructed by Bassin, played a devil's tattoo on the horn. The motor cyclist looked up, and Bassin, terror of the coconut-shy proprietors on Hampstead Heath, aimed in swift succession three of the ripe tomatoes, every one of which found its mark.

By the time the bearded man had found his revolver the car had roared away, up and over the crest of a hill, George bending slightly forward, a grin of schoolboy pleasure (Mrs. Bradley caught it in the inside driving mirror) on his usually sober and impassive countenance, and Bassin, beside her, whooping in an imbecile manner which attracted the attention of the police but, fortunately, it seemed, sympathetically.

George pulled up outside the “Lion,” rearranged his expression, and sat awaiting further orders.

“What about both of us going to see old Carey?” Bassin suggested. Mrs. Bradley agreed that this would be an agreeable way of spending the afternoon, so they went in to a lunch of soup, roast pork, spinach, and ice cream, drank from a bottle labelled, with considerable felicity, *Burgundy, Produce of France*, and then co-opted George again to take them to the nudist camp.

“I beg your pardon, madam,” said George, “but I believe I remember noticing that a preliminary notification was desirable in the case of parties wishing to attend upon the inmates.”

“The what, George?” enquired his employer.

“Well, madam, perhaps I should say the guests, but I can’t really imagine anybody in their right minds—all questions of prurience and the Defence of the Realm Act aside—”

“No, neither can I, George. But we must remember that one half of the world and the other half of the world—”

“Yes, but even the Polynesians, madam—”

“Quite so, George. The state, as you point out, is pathological.”

“Touching his first objection, Mrs. Bradley,” observed Bassin, “I take it that we don’t propose to advertise our coming?”

“I think perhaps we should descend like the Assyrian. There is everything to be said in favour of a surprise attack, child. Drive on, George. We must waive the conventions for once.”

“Very good, madam. Do you anticipate that we shall be ambushed at the entrance to the grounds?”

“No, George, but perhaps we had better take precautions.”

“I have my tin hat, madam, supplied to me, this time, as an air-raid warden, if you would care to avail yourself of its

protection.”

“It is kind of you, George, but I think I had better depend upon my grey hairs and the chivalry of the attackers. But by all means wear the tin hat. It will add interest, if not safety, to our progress.”

George declined to avail himself of the permission, and by half-past two the car had arrived at the gates of the Sanctuary and was winding its way decorously between the trees which bordered the drive.

Contrary to George’s fears, they were met and welcomed by the Leader, and Mrs. Bradley was borne off to continue her psychological studies. Several of the nudists had volunteered to become the vehicles of research, and she was profitably employed for about an hour and three-quarters in trying out on them elementary intelligence tests, word-reactions, light hypnosis, auto-suggestion, and indications of amnesia.

George remained in the car, which, at the request of the Leader, he removed to the outskirts of the Sanctuary proper, and Bassin, who also stayed with the car, was left to amuse himself as best he could.

“I am afraid our rules do not allow you to penetrate further,” the Leader observed courteously, “unless of course —”

“I’ll wait here, thanks. I’ve plenty of cigarettes,” said Bassin. He offered cigarettes to George, and they were halfway through the second round when they noticed the Red Indian approach of a thin but personable young man whose voice, when, treading suddenly upon a twig, he gave tongue with obvious annoyance, indicated the presence of Carey Lestrangle.

He came over to the car, climbed in, seated himself, and drew a rug towards him. Without a word he twitched Bassin’s cigarette from between his lips and smoked the rest of it. Bassin sympathetically produced his case, and Carey, having finished the half-cigarette, took another.

"The only thing I really miss," he said. "Nobody here seems to smoke. Where's my Aunt Adela?"

"Interviewing various of the maniacs," Bassin replied. "Well, how goes the Garden of Eden?"

"Haven't spotted Carn yet, but half the clientele are disguised, I should say. Complete with beards and under other names. But the man himself—what did you say?"

"Beards?"

"Yes. Big, bushy, Bolshevik beavers. Why not?"

"Any sign of tomato on any of 'em?"

"Don't know. They're all pretty dirty feeders here, if it comes to that. I wouldn't say that one was any worse than another. In any case, we haven't had tomatoes today."

"Listen, you babbler. A bearded bloke on a motor bike took a pop at me with a gun this morning, out by Huddon's Mouth Valley. Know the place?"

"Yes. Probably aiming at a seagull or something, don't you think?"

"No, I don't think so at all. George will bear me out."

"He certainly tried to get Mr. Bassin, sir," said George.

"And now you come along with all sorts of stories about beards," said Bassin, "and it makes me think a bit."

"Why? Plenty of blokes have beards, besides the comparatively simple-souled denizens of this Sanctuary. Anybody could assume one for the purposes of crime. Look at the assumed beards of literature. We have Bottom, weighing the merits of various colours in beards; we have the Satyr Colman with blood on his beard where he had cut himself shaving; we have Dionysus, who, in addition to assuming the leopard skin and buskins of Heracles, undoubtedly sported a beaver to complete the change of costume; we have people off whose faces Sherlock Holmes peeled beards; we have Othello, indubitably bearded; the missionary bishop of Miss Rose Macaulay, who grew the fungus in order to show the natives that he could; young Bingo Little, disguised as one of the Sons of Liberty,

completely shrouded in the shrubbery; Professor Bhaer, George Osborne—”

“Little Lord Fauntleroy’s grandfather and W. G. Grace,” said Bassin. “Now, listen, fathead, and get this. I chucked tomatoes at this fellow on the motor bike and winged him not fewer than three times, each time bespattering the whiskers with ripe juice and a good proportion of pips.”

“I get it,” said Carey, “although I feel compelled to point out that W. G. Grace, like Augustus John, although bearded, is a historical, as distinct from a literary, personage. I’ll go and talk to the boss. We’re quite pally. He doesn’t, of course, know who I am from Adam, doesn’t connect Auntie with the police, and I don’t want him to connect me with you. I simply had to have a cigarette, that’s all. I’ll be getting back now. We’re not expected to be out as far as this really, without our pants. Give me your case and some matches. Thanks.”

“A moment. In your casual conversation, when and if you do meet our friend, you might find out whether he knew that his wife *a/ways* mixed up the letters *b* and *d* on the typewriter.”

“Is that your own idea, or one of Aunt Adela’s?”

“Both. We’ve been over all the stuff, manuscript, typescript and, once again, the proofs, and it seems that Mrs. Carn always confused those letters and used to type all Carn’s stuff.”

“All right. I’ll ask him, if I see him. Which is to say, if he’s here.”

“Just casually.”

“Yes. But it’s awkward, because I’m not supposed to know who he is, you see, even if I do spot him.”

“Get on to it somehow.”

“Yes. Well, I must be slipping. I’ll have a chance to speak to Aunt Adela when I’m within the pale once more. See you later. Thanks for the cigarettes.”

He put aside the rug, climbed carefully out of the car and slipped in among the bushes.

"Reminds one of the fauns of ancient mythology, sir," observed George. "The dappled effect of the sun shining through the leaves, etcetera."

"Etcetera indeed," agreed Bassin. "Speaking of which, I hear voices. I'm going to lie doggo. I don't want to be seen by anybody who might recognise me."

He curled up on the floor of the car and George pushed a rug over him, and then sat immobile at the wheel, the model of a chauffeur waiting for his employer. A woman's head was poked up from behind a rhododendron clump, and another followed it.

"It's all right," said the first head. "It's only a chauffeur."

"I'm certain I heard voices," said the other. "It *must* have been Mr. Lestrangle, and he's eluded us again, naughty man. Let's ask the chauffeur whether he saw him or spoke to him."

"Had we better?"

"Yes. We can call from here. We need not go any nearer."

"Mr. Lestrangle has been and has gone, madam," said George. "He took all the cigarettes I had, and gave me two shillings."

"Cigarettes!" said the second woman, in a tone of ecstasy.

"He won't give *us* any," said the first. "Besides we've given up smoking. It's part of the cure."

"I'm going to ask him point-blank for one. He can't very well refuse."

"No, but he'll hate you for life."

"Well, I *must have one. Come along.*"

Their heads ducked down again. After a couple of minutes Bassin emerged, dusted himself, rubbed his head where he had bumped it, and lit one of George's cigarettes.

"Think they'll wind us, sir?" enquired George, at the end of the next five minutes. "The breeze, you'll notice, blows towards the woods."

"I shouldn't think they would. If they do, and I duck down again, you'd better chuck them each a couple, and pretend you've found a packet you didn't know you'd got. Wonder how long Mrs. Bradley will be? I'd overlooked the fairly important point that, whereas she'd be able to wander at will among the lunatics, we should be kept outside."

"The remedy is in your own hands, sir," George suggested.

"Yes, but at a price, George."

"A first-class athlete, such as yourself, sir, would hardly need to fear that odious comparisons would be drawn between your personal unadorned appearance, sir, and that of the other gentlemen. Besides, I believe that you would not feel so much out of place as you fear. When in Rome, sir —"

"Yes, I know. But don't forget that in the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king. I should prefer to retain my trousers."

"But, according to Mr. Wells, sir, if you remember—"

"Oh, well, perhaps you're right, but it still wouldn't help me with Carn. He's pretty sure to recognise me. I wish to goodness I could remember a bit more clearly what *he* looked like."

"I think you will find the nude a very effective disguise, sir. After all, it must be the most impenetrable disguise most human beings can assume. When did Mr. Carn see you last, sir?"

"To the best of my knowledge, when I was sixteen. But, except that I've got bigger and so on, I don't think I've changed much."

"You'd be surprised, sir. Personally, I would have said that it was emphatically worth the risk. You want to find out

whether the gentleman with the beard could have been Mr. Carn, sir, and this is the golden opportunity to do it."

"You're right," said Bassin. "It is. Give me half a dozen of your cigarettes and some matches. I'll stalk those two wood-nymphs, bribe them, and get them to introduce me to all the chaps with beards. It'll be pretty tough if I can't pick out the one I plastered with those tomatoes, if he's here."

• CHAPTER 10 •

Psychological Evidence

“Then the queen caught the sword up fiercely in her hand, and ran into the room where Sir Tristram was yet in his bath, and, making straight to him, had run him through the body, had not his squire, Sir Hebes, got her in his arms, and pulled the sword away from her.”

•1•

Against the strict canons of the establishment, Bassin retained his shoes. Charging George to keep an eye on the rest of his clothing, he got out of the car and slipped in among the trees. Unable at first to rid himself of an uncomfortable feeling that he was behaving contrary to statute and in a manner likely to lead to arrest, conviction, and sentence, he sneaked from one tree-trunk to the next in deadly fear of encountering the two women who were in search of Carey.

Fortunately, the first nudists he met were men, a small, white-haired, grandfatherly one with the body of a monkey—long-armed, short-legged and, in the attitude and act of walking, clownish and ungainly, and a man of early middle age whose bony countenance was surmounted by a panama hat, ornamented by rimless pince-nez and made unmistakable by a long scar which ran from the temple all the way down the left side to the corner of the mouth, giving

him, instead of what Nature appeared to have intended for a benign, intellectual expression, a sardonic, unpleasant smile.

The gentleman raised his panama, and both men glanced at Bassin's shoes.

"A new member, apparently," said the hat-raiser.

"Indubitably," said the other.

"I was looking for Mr. Lestrangle. He promised to show me the ropes," said Bassin. "I haven't joined yet. I was told I could look round, so long as I—er—"

"Conformed to the rules. Quite so," said the elderly man. "Come along. My name is Child and this is my son Timothy."

"My name's Aubrey," said Bassin, telling, thus far, the truth, for it was his second baptismal name. The three then walked in single file, the older Mr. Child leading and his son bringing up the rear, until they emerged from the wood and found themselves in a meadow, at the far end of which was a kind of summerhouse with a verandah.

"Ah, this will interest you," said the old gentleman.

"Experimental psychology. The famous psychoanalyst, Doctor Beatrice Adela Lestrangle Bradley, is conducting an exhaustive enquiry into the psychology of nudism. Mr. Call, Mr. Smith, Miss Violet, and Mr. and Mrs. Leonard have offered themselves as subjects, and Doctor Beatrice Adela is also taking a general survey. Very interesting and, I should say, instructive. Nudism, Mr. Aubrey, is more than a cult. It is a religion. We are all hot gossellers here."

He smiled, and (for he had halted to make the discourse) began to walk towards the summerhouse.

"We must do no more than just peep in at the window," he observed, suddenly bending his knees and approaching the airy little structure with exaggerated care. "Perhaps you will be fortunate enough to meet Doctor Beatrice Adela later."

Bassin, prodded by Mr. Timothy Child, whose fingers were long and bony, moved forward and looked in over the window-sill. His training, both legal and athletic, stood him in

good stead, for directly in front of him sat two bearded men, one of them undoubtedly the motor cyclist. Beside them sat a thin, anaemic girl of about twenty-seven or eight. All three were robed, with some dignity, in dark brown blankets which they wore draped over the left arm and under the right, to leave them free to write. At the next table sat a nude young couple, ill-nourished and nervous.

"Beaver," said Mrs. Bradley. "Sink. Co-opt. Black. Bishop. Tone. Run. Crash. False. Apple. Round. Bent. Hair. Storm. Water. Dream. Flint. Cheshire. Cart. Paper. Woman. Cup. Bed."

One of the bearded men glanced up as the voice ceased. It was the motor cyclist. Bassin ducked out of sight below the window ledge.

"That's right," said old Mr. Child when they had left the hut forty yards behind them. "It is not quite fair to go and watch them. I wish you could have spoken to Doctor Beatrice. A wonderful woman. Truly a wonderful woman."

"What's her idea really?" enquired Bassin. "Does she want to find out why people take up nudism, or what their reactions are when once they've taken it up?"

"Well, she was quite frank with us. She said that she thought we were all the slaves of a morbid exhibitionism. We, of course, were only too ready to challenge this view. A little exhibitionism, as our Leader pointed out, is healthy and normal. Besides, we come here for the sake of our health, for the sake of our principles, and—er—well, those things chiefly."

"I see," said Bassin. "Mr. Lestrangle told me that it was all very enjoyable and carefree."

"I am afraid," said Timothy Child, removing his pince-nez and so uncovering short-sighted eyes the troubled colour of stale oysters, "that Mr. Lestrangle is inclined to be irresponsible."

"Although one hesitates to say it of Doctor Beatrice Adela's nephew, naturally," said his father. "He has however,

introduced an unwelcome note—a very unwelcome note. As you are a friend, you will be able to point this out, perhaps, in a manner and with an authority, which would seem unsuitable in us. Come along. It grieves me to do it, but I will show you what we mean.”

It was apparent, thought Bassin, stifling a sympathetic grin, what they meant. Once through an opening in the field-hedge, they were in a small garden beautifully and smoothly paved, and on two sides of it were hedges of dark yew, clipped and thick, and forming the background to a scene in which Carey appeared to be taking the parts of producer and chief actor. He was garlanded with blossoms which looked a thick, dead white against his brown body, his hair had grown long, but, unlike (Bassin discovered later) the great majority of the male nudists, he had shaved, and the somewhat grimy hand which he was offering to one of his players—a youngish, giggling woman—was long and beautiful.

“Hullo, you two,” he said, catching sight of the father and son. “Just the people. Look here, sir”—he took the old man by the arm—“if you wouldn’t mind standing here and being Jupiter—oh, yes, you are, sir, really. Just the type. And you, Timothy—yes, on one leg, if you please; the other just—so. Splendid. Now then, Millie,” he continued, addressing the giggler, “once more. Take the apple—no, it’s not the size of a football, fathead!—and hold it out. Now, Kathleen and Doris, you look as much annoyed as you can. Think of a bargain sale, and that Millie has just snatched from under your very nose the hat you saw in the window and had marked for your very own. That’s marvellous. Right. Cut!”

He turned to Bassin.

“Just a few tableaux to present at the end of my happy holiday here. May I know your name?”

“Aubrey,” said Bassin, as Jupiter, beaming now upon Carey, and Mercury, equally pleased, rejoined him in front of an enormous clump of lavender. “Don’t say you don’t

recognise me, old man! I've been telling Mr. Child and Mr. Timothy Child that you recommended me to come here."

"Oh, yes, I did, didn't I? Didn't imagine for a minute you'd do it, though. Good for you, old man. But I simply didn't spot it was you at first. Ah, Nature, Nature!" said he, shaking his head at Bassin's impressive torso and handsome, muscular flanks. "Dear, dear, dear, dear, dear!"

He stood musing, whilst the Childs meandered off. Then, turning his head briskly, he said to the three women:

"Same time tomorrow, my darlings. And see you at the pool at half-past ten as usual. And mind, no finking that springboard, young Kathleen, this time!"

The women, giggling happily, ran off with conscious balletomane grace, and Carey, relaxing, fumbled at his left ear, which was hidden by his long black hair, extracted a cigarette, walked over to a statue of Diana, and extracted from the niche between her side and her quiver a box of matches.

"Well, my bold son of a gun," he said, leading the way back to the meadow and seating himself on the grass, "and what the devil brings you along in the disguise? I didn't know whether I was supposed to know you or not."

Bassin explained about the beards.

"Two a penny here," said Carey. "I could show you at least two better ones—bigger *and* better—than either of those sported by the tough nuts that Aunt Adela has got caged up in that summerhouse. One is brilliant red, and the other is blue. One dyes it, t'other don't."

"Yes, but one of those she's got in there is my motor cyclist," said Bassin. "Is it accident or done a-purpose, that she should happen to have hit on him, I wonder. How long has she been doing this psychology stunt?"

"This is their fourth dose."

"So she'd started on them before that fellow potted at us this morning?"

"Yes. She started yesterday, as soon as I arrived."

"Oh, then he was probably potting at her. I could have sworn it was at me. But I expect he objected to something she'd found out about him and decided to let her knowledge die with her, as it were. I bet these nudists, or some of them, are the original Peculiar People."

"Possibly. Did Aunt Adela think that you were the person aimed at?"

"I gathered so. So did George, but apparently she didn't really think so, or else she was mistaken."

"Ah, she's deep, though, is the old soul. Deep as the whale's belly. And talking of bellies, do you know the effect this place is having on me? I feel that I never want to see another female, or paint one or go to bed with one, ever any more, world without end. And so I wrote to old Jenny."

"I can feel for you," said Bassin. "Well, having spotted the beaver, I think I'll be getting back. Which would be the nearest way to the car? We seemed to do a trek of some eight or nine miles to reach this meadow."

"Old Pop Child showing off the terrain, that was, I expect. He's a shareholder, I believe."

"What else does he do for a living?"

"Owns about half the rapidly developing watering-place called Whinberry-on-Sea. Heard of it? Not a bad old chap. Better stuff than son Timothy."

"Wherefore the scar? War wound?"

"Not much. Tim was a Conchy. Very, very gun-shy. Full of noble ideals. No, his wife gave him that because he wouldn't divorce her. So then he let her divorce him. Physical coward of the first water. Can't help it, of course, poor devil, but it puts one off loving him like a brother, for some reason or another. Aunt Adela could explain it. In fact, she did, uncomplimentarily to me."

"Oh?"

"Said I didn't like physical cowards because I had a sort of little-child complex and was really afraid that in time of danger they would leave me to my fate and not fight to save

me. Come through here, and we can get back inside ten minutes. Go canny, in case of accidents.”

“One thing,” said Bassin, as they reached the edge of the wood and branched off sharply to the right, “could anybody get out of here fairly easily, and get back again, without being seen to go, and without being missed? I’m thinking of the beaver with the gun.”

“Oh yes, easily enough. He’d only need to choose his time. We’ve all got access to our clothes, you see, and although the idea is to stay here all the time you’ve clocked in for, in actual practice people do slip away for a binge or a drive and things. Some of ’em come for a lark, you see, and soon get sick of a healthy, open-air life. Others go off to get a drink, or are recalled on business.”

“Any possibility of finding out whether this particular bloke—it’s the thinner one—was out this morning and came back with tomato on his beard?”

“I’ll see what I can sleuth. But if you recognised him, that’s that.”

“It wouldn’t be enough for the police.”

“No, that’s possibly true. All right, then. I’ll do my best. One thing, everybody gossips here all day long. Nothing much else to do. Hullo, George, here we are again!”

They had reached the entrance to the grounds.

•2•

“And now—what?” said Bassin, when he and Mrs. Bradley were again headed for the “Lion.”

“Carey will join us tomorrow. This evening after dinner, I will show you the results of my investigations.”

“Oh?” said Bassin. “A great light dawns. Do you mean to say that your intelligence test, or whatever it was, led you to some information about the murder of Mrs. Carn?”

"Well, I chose my victims carefully. About two-thirds of the colony volunteered, but the beards seemed beautifully suspicious, so I selected them."

"Senss and Carn, you think? Wonder which is which? Pity you couldn't have got hold of the other German, Simplon—or, rather, Bonner."

"Yes—Bonner," said Mrs. Bradley, giving him a quick glance which reminded him of a bird seeing a worm. "Child, you wouldn't care to go for quite a long holiday—to Monte Carlo or somewhere—would you?"

"No." He pondered for a minute, and then said:

"After all, you can't be certain that I was the person he aimed at. It might just as well have been you."

"Or George," said Mrs. Bradley, with a chuckle. "Yes, it might have been, but it wasn't."

George drove in under the archway, which led to the yard of the "Lion." Dinner was already being served.

"Now," said Mrs. Bradley, when the meal was over, "let us go to your room and I'll tell you what I've discovered."

Bassin agreed, locked his door, drew the curtains, and pulled two chairs close together underneath the light, although it was odd, at that early hour of the evening—for it was then no more than half-past seven—to put the light on, and Mrs. Bradley took out a large note-book, extracted from a pocket, at the back of it, half a dozen folded sheets and, spreading the top one out, began her discourse.

"Acting on the principle that people who change their names often adopt the same initial letter for the new name as they had for the old, let us assume, for the sake of argument," she said, "that Mr. Call is Mr. Carn and that Mr. Smith is Mr. Senss. I am glad you were able to obtain that much information from Mr. Child, because I am bound not to ask for the names of my volunteers. But now to work out their identities and peculiarities from the answers to my questions."

"I see that none of the five has headed the answer-paper in any way whatsoever. Not even a date appears," observed Bassin.

"I had to agree to that, but all five have very different styles of handwriting. See how this obviously German script differs from any of the others. Here, I assume, is Miss Violet's weak, neat hand. This illegible stuff, which is not a doctor's, but might easily be an author's indecipherable scribble, is surely Mr. Call. The married couple each use the same kind of nib—I noticed that—so that although their handwriting is not similar, for his is the pedagogue's semi-printed hand, and hers is a schoolgirl scrawl, neither script looks in the least like that of the un-English Mr. Smith, who did not even use a fountain-pen. As for Mr. Call, his a's, e's, i's and u's, not to speak of his m's, n's, h's, and r's, are all interchangeable. He does not differentiate between *h* and *l*, and he makes the letter *s* in two dissimilar ways, even in the same word. A careless, unstable, disloyal, weak, nerve-ridden, unconventional, unjust, irresponsible, inconsistent sort of man, this Mr. Call, child, don't you think?"

"It's Carn, all right. You don't need a handwriting expert to compare this fist with Carn's manuscript. But isn't he too negative for a murderer?"

"Come, let us see what they have written," said Mrs. Bradley, without answering the question. "As I hope to obtain some information about the murder—and other things—from these papers, perhaps we had better tabulate our results."

She unfolded a blank sheet of paper and headed it rapidly, in her own indecipherable, medico-legal handwriting, with the names of the five volunteers. Then, in a column at the left-hand side of the paper, she wrote the list of test words which Bassin had heard her dictating.

"I gave other general tests," she said, "but these word-associations were what I wanted to discover the reactions of Mr. Carn and Mr. Senss. Look here, you write down, and I'll

read out. Have you a pen? Take mine. Oh, you like your own better. Of course."

Bassin passed her the completed sheet when it was ready. She took it, and looked it over. His delicate, masculine handwriting was a pleasure to read, she observed. The result of the tabulation was as follows:

Word	Call	Smith	Violet	Leonard(M.)	Leonard(F.)
Beaver*	Beard	Build	Fur	Woods	Grey Owl
Sink*	Flop	--	Kitchen	Drop	Drown
Co-opl*	Help	Democratic	Society	Committee	Assistance
Black*	Cock	Guards	And White	White	Bird
Bishop	Mate	Move	Gaiters	Sleeves	Barnes
Tune	Deaf	Bell	Low	Loud	Poem
Run	Race	Escape	Race	Race	After
Crash	Bang	Ruin	Smash	Car	Flames
False*	--	Friend	Hair	Fair	Teeth
Apple	Pie	Round	Tart	Day	Pie
Round	Ring	Table	Robin	Square	Ring
Bent	Pin	Broke	Straight	Wing	Car
Hair	--	Blood	Net	Pin	Slide
Storm	Trouper	--	Crash	Loud	Rain
Water	Wheel	Power	Works	Bridge	Witch
Dream	Night	Life	Sleep	Green	Days
Flint	Road	--	Flint	Axe	Fight
Cheshire*	Cheese	--	Cheese	Caves	Cheese
Cart	Horse	Horse	Horse	Wheel	Track
Paper	Weight	Plan	Clip	Packet	Chain
Woman*	Wife	Frau	Hater	Breast	Man
Cup	Broke	Tea	Tea	Smash	Water
Bed	Room	Cold	Dark	White	Bug

*These were Mrs. Bradley's key-words.

"How do you like it?" asked Mrs. Bradley, passing it back when she had read it.

"Doesn't mean a thing to me, I'm afraid, except that it looks as though you are right about it being Senss."

"How do you mean, child?"

"Well, obviously, 'Smith' is a foreigner. The words 'sink,' 'flint,' and 'Cheshire' don't seem to mean anything to him. Apart from anything else, you've caught him nicely over 'woman.'"

"And 'storm,' child?"

"Oh, well, I suppose he's inhibited because of the Nazis, isn't he?"

"Possibly. Nevertheless, he filled in 'guards' for 'black.' But there are blank spaces on Mr. Call's sheet also. How do you account for those?"

"Oh, well, he's conscious of his false beard, I suppose. Oh, no, that can't be right, because he filled in 'beard' opposite 'beaver' quite blithely, didn't he? Then he left a blank beside 'hair,' and—oh, I see! He was the man who knocked Mrs. Carn on the head."

"Oh, we can't go quite as far as that. After all, Mr. Smith-Senss filled in 'blood,' which looks horribly sinister! The answers are interesting, though, and in the case of the other three people, who obviously have little to hide, very easy to follow."

"Yes. The Leonards must have had a car smash, mustn't they? And Miss Violet is somebody's typist, I suppose. Just about the mentality. Oh, the Leonards don't sleep together, and Mrs. Leonard is rather the arty-and-crafty kind of literary high-brow. I say, you must have some fun at your job."

He switched on the fire, for the list had taken some little time to compile, and the evening was drawing in. "What do you think of my ideas?"

"Very promising." She chuckled, and then added:

"I don't think we can do much more tonight. I doubt whether Carey can find out whether Mr. Smith—I presume it was Mr. Smith?—left the Sanctuary this morning in order to shoot at you, and whether he does discover it or not, it will

be as well for you that Mr. Smith did not see you this afternoon."

"You really think I was the target? I've been trying to persuade myself that you were. In any case, why should Senss, if it *is* Senss, pot at me? I've never done *him* any harm. Of course, if you're wrong, and it happens to be Carn, I suppose he might have some grudge."

"How so, child?"

"Well, I look at it this way: Mrs. Carn came to no harm, in spite of the threatening letters, until she sent for me, as a representative of the firm, to take charge of those corrected proofs. You must admit that it's a bit odd that her death came just on that particular afternoon. Looks as though the murderer, whoever he was, knew that I was coming and seized his opportunity."

"Yes. It would be interesting, though, child, to know exactly what that opportunity was, and how it rose, and why it occurred to the murderer to seize it. It was such a sudden opportunity, you see."

"This all means," said Bassin, shrewdly, "that you don't believe Carn murdered his wife."

"Motive," said Mrs. Bradley. "All murders come back to that, child. Means and opportunity bulk larger in other antisocial acts, particularly in stealing, for example, but there are, fortunately, very few motiveless murders. If Carn had a motive for killing his wife, it seems to have been that he might marry Mrs. Saxant. But as he could not marry Mrs. Saxant unless Mr. Saxant divorced her or he killed him, that motive seems a little thin."

"But we don't know that he isn't plotting against Saxant."

"No, we don't know that. Why do you suppose Mr. Simplon was injured, child?"

"What's that got to do with Carn?"

"Exactly. What *has* it to do with Carn?"

"No connection, so far as we know. Yes, I see what you mean. But even if Senss laid out Simplon, what reason could he have had for killing Mrs. Carn? The anti-Jew business doesn't affect him, it appears, and, if it did, he could have refused to publish the book or killed Carn."

"He may still kill Carn, child. It is quite possible that the book cannot be published whilst Carn remains alive."

"You mean there's something on the corrected proofs that we're not allowed to see?"

"The proofs that Mr. Simplon-Bonner was prepared to bum down the printing press to destroy."

"Yes. But what's the idea behind it all?"

"That, we don't know, but we can guess. The most powerful motive in the world, I believe, is revenge. We heard from Mrs. Saxant that Mr. Senss's brother was killed by the Nazis. Simplon-Bonner represents that party, it appears. Therefore, somewhere behind all this there may be a plot against him."

"But we haven't come upon any such plot yet, have we?"

"No, child."

"Then—no, I'll give it up, and wait until Carey gets back and can tell us, perhaps, a bit more. Let's have a nightcap, shall we? And so to bed."

•3•

Carey came back in the car next morning, driven by the gratified George. He looked brown and happy, and pronounced himself very sorry to leave the Arcadian beauties of the camp for the more drab surroundings of the "Lion," but added that he should be glad to eat some roast beef and Yorkshire. Food at the Sanctuary, although plentiful, was strictly vegetarian in type.

"And now," said Mrs. Bradley, when her nephew had finished a plate of ham and eggs especially served to him at eleven o'clock, and the three of them were seated at his table by the window, "I think we must have a round-table conference."

"Look here," said Bassin, "I'd like to go right back to the beginning. You see, I was almost on the spot when Mrs. Carn was murdered, and it might be that if we took the whole thing, step by step, from my first arrival at the house—well, what do you think?"

"A very good idea, child," said Mrs. Bradley. "One thing which struck me when you gave us your account of what had happened was in connection with the cash-box itself. I made a note. Yes. You quote Mrs. Carn as having said that Fortinbras (her husband) was very anxious that you should take charge of the cash-box and the letters. From that I infer, as no doubt you yourself did, that you had been sent for at Mr. Carn's wish."

"Yes, I understood that that was what she meant. But they could equally well have sent them to us, you know."

"Or," said Mrs. Bradley, referring again to her notes, "she could, as you suggested, have brought them to your office when she was in London on the Thursday before her death."

"Yes, or shoved them in the bank. She could have done that in the village, which, actually, is quite a growing little place, thanks to motorists."

"A more interesting point still," said Mrs. Bradley, "and the more I think about it the more interesting and suggestive it becomes, is that she told you that Mr. Carn himself forbade her to take the cash-box and the letters to your office, urging that she might be attacked if she carried them about."

"Yes. That looks pretty bad, doesn't it? I don't wonder the police were after him. He made some pretty bad breaks, what with that and the disappearing trick. It looks as though

he couldn't face the inquest. That's what the police based their suspicions on, naturally, wasn't it?"

"Well, child, one could equally well explain his non-attendance on the grounds that he had been abducted."

"Yes, but that would only hold ground if the body the police had found was really his. But we're pretty sure that Carn's in the Nudist Sanctuary."

"Another thing," said Carey. "Those anonymous letters. You read them all, didn't you?"

"Every one. In fact, I had time to read them more than once. I've told you all about them."

"Yes. Aren't they exactly the kind of things you'd expect a literary bloke to write? I mean, I've been thinking about the whole thing a goodish bit while sporting with the loonies in the colony, and it seems to me that, of all the people who've been connected in any way with the case so far as we know, Carn is the only one who would have written all that stuff about Prynn."

"That only refers to all the people we know about, though," said Bassin. "That brings in something else Mrs. Carn told me."

"Yes, about the number of enemies, many of them quite unknown to him, that a literary critics makes. I know. That *is* the rub. Yes, all right. I withdraw. Let my observation read: Carn, *or some other literary bird*, wrote those letters."

"And where does that get us?" asked Bassin.

"Well, I should say that it ruled out everybody *we* know of, *except Carn*."

"And brings in a thousand or so assorted writers that we don't know from Adam, and that Carn didn't know, and that Mrs. Carn didn't know."

"Don't take on so," said Mrs. Bradley kindly. "There is one more thing, and I believe it might supply another opening. Do you remember mentioning that Mrs. Carn told you of another letter, not one of the series—from which I assume she meant that it was signed, as well as being of a

different character from the rest—which she was to show you if her husband agreed?”

“Yes. Funny thing, that. I’ve racked my brains a good many times, trying to think who could have sent it, and what it was about.”

“Another literary party,” said Carey, “and still about Carn’s book.”

“I should not be one bit surprised if that letter came from Mr. Saxant or Mr. Senss, and was a straightforward appeal to Mr. Carn not to print his book,” said Mrs. Bradley.

“But, in that case—” began Bassin. Then he stopped. “No, I see. One partner alone, whichever it was, could not have stopped the printing. And, even if they agreed about it, I suppose they knew that Carn would only get it printed by somebody else if they turned the contract down.”

“Lyle’s, for instance,” said Carey. “But I don’t think Lyle’s would touch a book like that. After all—”

“Another interesting point,” interposed Mrs. Bradley, “is why Carn did not lecture in Southampton that day, and yet came home at about the time that his wife had expected to see him. What did he do, I wonder, after he left Mrs. Saxant?”

“Queer he came home at all,” said Carey, “if he was going to dodge the inquest in that idiotic way. It would have been more sensible to give himself a complete alibi for the whole afternoon, evening and night. It was the most frightful damn foolishness not to go to Southampton, at least for part of the time, so that somebody could swear to having seen him there.”

“I wish,” said Bassin, “we could trace that beastly cash-box. You see, the murderer had to get it open without the key, which I still carry about with me.”

“I am under the firm impression,” said Mrs. Bradley, “That the contents of the cash-box were so well known to the murderer in their every detail, that he wouldn’t bother a bit

about opening it. His only aim was to prevent anybody else having access to the corrected proofs, that's all."

"Then that could point to Carn as much as to anybody," said Carey. "But, somehow, although I can't say how, I feel that a cloud somewhere has been lifted from my brain during this little parade of all our knowledge. Doubtless I shall wake up in the night giving my Patrol call or yelping like a hound in full cry."

He had scarcely spoken when the door opened suddenly. Bassin, with the practised action of a man who had represented his university in putting the shot, picked up the uncut cottage loaf which was on the table—Carey had eaten toast—and lobbed it scientifically and with remarkable accuracy of aim, full in the bearded face of the intruder.

A gun exploded and the bullet hit the ceiling. Bassin and Carey were out of their chairs in an instant. Mrs. Bradley, no less nimble and even more intelligent, swung open the casement window and dropped out into the yard, where she scurried for her car.

George, who was in the public bar, heard and recognised his own engine, left a pint pot standing on the counter, trod on his cigarette, and leapt for the garage.

"All right, madam," he shouted, recognising his employer in the driving-seat. Mrs. Bradley moved over. The car crept out of the garage and George, to save time in turning, backed her out under the archway into the road.

"Motor bike! Ballington way!" shouted Carey, leaping on to the running-board. At the turn they picked up Bassin, who had sprinted after the marauder, with more idiocy than courage (as Mrs. Bradley severely pointed out) since he was the object of the revolver attacks, but, she admitted, helpfully.

"Wanted to see which turn he took," said Bassin. "Left, towards Lower Ballington." He, too, climbed aboard, and George, who was scarcely ever permitted to drive fast, now won a secret bet with himself that the car could do

Ballington Rise on top gear if she and he chose that she should.

But there was no sign of the motor cycle, and at the first cross-roads, which occurred about seven miles over the top of the Rise, they gave up the actual chase and merely drove to Ballington police station to give a description of the shooting incident. This had to be done, since people at the "Lion" must have heard the sound of the shot.

"And now," said Mrs. Bradley, when George turned the car and was heading for the "Lion" at a discreet and comfortable forty, "we are going to the railway station, child, and you are going to rejoin your father in London."

"No," said Bassin.

"No, perhaps you are right. It's too obvious. Have you any aunts in Scotland, say, or are you inclined to take a short holiday in one of the Channel Islands? Some parts of the Norfolk Broads are attractive. You could live on your craft."

"I want to stay here," said Bassin. "I can't help it if some lunatic in a beard decides to keep potting at me."

"It *was* the tomato fellow, I suppose?" Carey enquired.

"You bet it was."

"Any suspicion of tomato still clinging to the whiskers, did you notice?"

"It was a different beard, I think," said Mrs. Bradley.

"It *is* Senss, I suppose?" said Bassin. "I wish I knew why the fathead has picked on me."

"I told you why it is. It is because he remembers that he let out to you the fact that Mr. Simplon and Mr. Bonner are one and the same person."

"Yes, but it doesn't mean anything to me if he did. Suppose Bonner likes to change his name over here—who cares? I can't see that it's a matter of life and death."

"Well, the fact that Bonner's name appears in Mr. Carn's book—"

"Yes—as a misprint for Donner, which Senss has surely altered back again by now."

“He may not have altered it back again, child. If you remember, the letter was *altered* by Mr. Carn on the typescript, it was *correct* on his own manuscript and yet was *wrong again* on the galley proof. Most suggestive, I consider.”

• CHAPTER 11 •

External Evidence

“... and saw his sword lie naked on the bed: anon she drew it from the scabbard and looked at it a long while, and both thought it a passing fair sword; but within a foot and a half of the end there was a great piece broken out, and while the queen was looking at the gap, she suddenly remembered the piece of sword-blade that was found in the brainpan of her brother Sir Marhaus.”

•1•

“There’s just one point,” said Mrs. Bradley.

“And what’s that, darling?” Carey enquired.

“It’s about the little girl who trod on the stiletto. A helpful child,” she added ruminatively, to Bassin.

“Yes. If she didn’t give us much positive information, she was at least able to establish that the chap who bolted with the cash-box after the murder of Mrs. Carn couldn’t have been Carn himself. I suppose he had an accomplice. I mean, she was very far from being a fatheaded child, and she assured me that she didn’t know the man who ran off with the cash-box. Therefore I deduced that the man couldn’t have been Carn.”

"I agree that she was intelligent. Do you remember mentioning to us how incredulous you were when she assured you that she had already been given sixpence for her information?"

"Well, the police don't usually give kids money, do they?"

"Possibly they do not; but the child didn't say the police."

"She said 'the other gentleman.' Whom else could she have meant but the inspector? He would have been in plain clothes. She wouldn't have known that he was a policeman."

"But the sixpence, as you say, is almost conclusive. I suggest that it was not the inspector but the murderer who provided the sixpence. If you had wanted information you should have offered her a shilling."

"Do you think she told lies, then, about not knowing the man? And about the cash-box?"

"No, only about the direction which the man took when he left Carn's house. She told the police what she had been bribed to tell anybody who asked her."

Bassin groaned.

Mrs. Bradley cackled. "Of course, as you say, she didn't know the plain-clothes inspector was a policeman," she observed, "and the murderer banked on that, too."

"And, of course," said Bassin, "I did discover afterwards that you could take a car round by the church. But, look here! Suppose Carn killed Mrs. Carn, then killed somebody else to make people think he himself was dead, why is he now hiding in the nudist Sanctuary? I mean, there's no warrant out for his arrest. Officially, he's dead, as far as he knows. He isn't being watched for at ports or airports. He could leave the country. He could even go to Scotland or Cornwall or somewhere, and change his identity. Why is he still stuck in the neighbourhood? It seems a potty way to behave."

"Now," said Mrs. Bradley with great enjoyment, "you have come to the very core of the problem. One thing I can tell you, and one only. If Carn was the man who bribed the little girl to tell that lie, the child did not recognise him. He was no longer wearing his small, neat beard. And that brings us back to the theft of the proofs and letters."

"If we could only get hold of a copy of that book!" said Carey.

"I agree," said his aunt, "but that will come all in good time. You know we wondered how Carn spent the interval between his leaving the house at ten minutes to one and the late hour at which, according to the servants, he came home? Well, I think he spent some of that time in a barber's shop—the police will find it, no doubt—and had his small beard removed. Then I think he 'tried out' his appearance on one or two people who knew him—that will be much more difficult to prove—and then—"

"Yes," said Carey, "but don't forget the time he spent with Mrs. Saxant, and that he returned to people who knew him perfectly well by sight—his own servants—"

"Yes, child. I was about to add that no doubt he had had the foresight to provide himself with a smaller false beard, similar to the one he had had removed, so that he could return in his own likeness, thus causing no comment upon his appearance."

"Fantastic, love," expostulated her nephew.

"I don't know so much," said Bassin. "You'd be amazed at the things people do. And, besides, unless he had altered his appearance pretty completely, it's hard to see why the police, with their thorough methods (and, mind you, they're marvellously thorough over that sort of thing—it's right up their street), can't find out what he did that afternoon and evening. Of course, they don't know about Mrs. Saxant—that was just our luck, getting that."

"All right, then," said Carey. "I concede that. We assume that he got himself shaved. We tip off the police to establish

that. Of course, he may have had it done in London—”

“All the better. He’d have to get to London, remember, and we’ve no evidence whatsoever that the car he used was his own.”

“Yes, but there’s a snag in all this,” said Carey suddenly. “I knew something was eating me.”

Mrs. Bradley regarded him with fond attention which mothers bestow on babies who seem about to make some intelligible remark.

“Yes, of course,” said Bassin.

“No, shut up! I had it first. Look, here, Aunt Adela, you said the child didn’t recognise him because he’d got rid of his beard. Now you say that he had it shaved off that afternoon, after he left Mrs. Saxant. I don’t see how he had time. You must be wrong.”

“He left Mrs. Saxant, murdered his wife,” said Mrs. Bradley, “and then—”

“Yes, and then rushed off with the cash-box, spotted that the child was watching him as he pelted past the duck-pond, bribed her to say he’d gone in the opposite direction—that’s to say, towards the village, instead of towards the church—”

“Got into the car that he had waiting, still wearing the *very heavy false beard* which we think he is still wearing at the Sanctuary,” said Mrs. Bradley, grinning, “took it off, to disclose *his own beard* underneath, then went and had his own beard shaved off and passed the rest of the afternoon trying out the disguise. I also expect he had his hair cut, and that is why his hats didn’t fit him. I think we could get him identified in an instant if we could take that child to the nudist colony, and yet that, of course, is just what we cannot possibly do, is it not?”

She sat back and cackled amiably.

“You really mean that Carn did murder his wife, then?”

“It seems to me that he must have done. The theft of the cash-box could have been achieved without murder,

surely, if that was the object of the raid. The knowledge of Justus's presence—and the immediate grasping of the chance directly his back was turned; the careful preparations—all the anonymous letters, the refusal to allow the cash-box to be sent away or taken to a place of safety so that it could be mistaken for the motive, the damnable business of the second murder—some poor tramp, I expect, devilishly kept and fed, and manicured and pedicured, probably for two or three months, to get him in condition for the impersonation. I've given the police all these hints, by the way. The chief constable used to be a very nice little boy."

"Good heavens, it does add up. If true," said Carey cautiously. Mrs. Bradley assured him that it was true.

"The police theory now is that the man was killed before Mrs. Carn. He must have been planning her murder and his own disappearance for at least a couple of years."

"But—not because of Mrs. Saxant?"

"That we still have to find out. I am inclined to think not. She, of course, was infatuated with him, thus causing agonies of jealousy to Mr. Senss."

"Oh, yes, Senss," said Bassin thoughtfully. He shot a suspicious glance at Mrs. Bradley. "I thought you thought it was Senss who had committed both the murders."

"But, dear child, why should he?"

"Well, this beastly book. Surely we haven't been chasing a red-herring all this time?"

"Time will show, child. And here, I perceive, is the railway station. A good train leaves for London in—" she looked at her watch "—twenty minutes. I wish this car had bullet-proof glass, like Herr Hitler's."

"You don't really suppose," said Bassin energetically, "that any bearded German crank with a couple of guns is going to get me on the run, do you? I'm staying here. We can put the police on to Carn any moment we feel like it. If we can't take the little girl there to identify him in the beard,

we can jolly soon get the police to hale him, clothed and in his right mind, in front of her here."

"In his right mind?" said Carey. "All I can say is that *The Open-Bellied Mountain* doesn't sound like it."

"We're talking about Senss," said Bassin.

"The book was a good indication of deep-seated mental disturbance, as, of course, all this anti-Jewish propaganda is," said Mrs. Bradley. "I knew the man was a potential murderer when I read those proofs, although I did not think it right to allow the fact to prejudice the course of the investigation."

"Yes, but we've still got to identify him," said Carey, "and I might tell you that it's going to be a practical impossibility. He couldn't possibly have chosen a better hiding place than among those half-witted sun-bathers, half of 'em whiskered and all of 'em wearing tinted glasses for the major part of the time. Why, Methuselah, supposing he could still get about on his pins, could hide there, and nobody suspect that he was the oldest man in the world, and Mahatma Gandhi could pass among the tin-ribbed platoon of vegetarian prohibitionists without a syllable of comment, as long as he shed the loin-cloth and talked about calories and vitamins."

"You don't appear to have enjoyed your residence at the Sanctuary," remarked his aunt, "although the point you make is a good one."

"It's such a good one," said Bassin, in the same vigorous way—for nobody likes to be shot at by a bearded man resembling, as Carey expressed it, the patriarch Abraham in motor cycling costume, "that I'm dashed if I don't have a stab at hiding up there myself. Provided with the essential beaver, I'm going to search out the past history of the other inmates as with a small-tooth comb."

"A thing some of the beavers could do with," said Carey vulgarly. He clapped Bassin on the back. "Attaboy!" he added, blessing the scheme. "I knew Aunt Adela was going

to lob *me* back into the rude, as my most engaging model persists in calling it, but with you alongside it won't be nearly so bad. So up, George, and at 'em!" he concluded.

•2•

At the "Lion" Mrs. Bradley insisted upon taking the most extraordinary precautions, and, in Carey's bedroom, the two young men speculated upon her hen-like attitude.

"If she thinks that bearded pea-shooting perisher is Senss, and not Carn, she must have something more up her sleeve than the mere apprehending of Carn for murder," Carey observed. Bassin, who had just concluded a preliminary survey of the beard, which Mrs. Bradley had produced, apparently from thin air, and bestowed on him, regarded it dubiously. "Have you ever worn the facial adornments, old man?" he added, tenderly feeling his chin.

"Yes, I was a Caliban once, and had hair glued practically all over me. Hellish, it was, but I survived. In fact, I took first prize and a duchess patted me. She was about a hundred and seven, and laboured to the last under the firm impression that she was judging at a dog-show and that I had won in the class for all-comers."

There was a tap at the door. It was George.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, addressing Carey, "but madam suggests I lay off with the car in the same little copse I did before, and remain the night, so if you wanted any message taken, or, possibly, to make a hasty exit, the means would be at hand."

"All right," said Carey. "Good idea."

"The car, sir," said George, wistfully, "would be all right on its own, and—"

"No, George. You stick to the car. We shall be all right. I could never look Aunt Adela in the face again, once you had been exposed to the horrors of that Sanctuary. Do you realise, George, that every day in that place they have community singing, and that you would be expected to join in?"

"Very good, sir. The car is ready at any moment, sir."

"OK. Lay in plenty of cigarettes for us, and provisions for yourself. Aunt Adela coming this time?"

"No, not this time, sir. She proposes to go to the farm next to the House by the Brook and make enquiry of the little girl there."

"Oh, good idea. Pump her as to the beaver, I suppose. Put some bottled beer in, George. I know where to hide it up at the Sanctuary. I suppose you won't wait after dawn?"

"I have orders to wait until precisely eight o'clock, sir. Madam thinks you should come away then."

"All right. Our first step, as I see it," he added, when George had gone, "is to discover and impound that chap's gun. After that we must get hold of Call and find out whether he's Carn. After that, if we escape with our lives, possibly another idea of what next to do for the best will be vouchsafed us."

Bassin agreed, and fitted on the beard, which Mrs. Bradley had provided. It looked, as he expressed it, *noticeably* false. He canvassed Carey's opinion on this point. Carey agreed that it did look noticeably false, but added that the majority of the beards in the Sanctuary also looked, and were, false, so that he saw no need for Bassin to worry.

"It gives men self-confidence," he said. "Marvellous how much less naked you feel in a beard."

"How do you know?" enquired Bassin, dabbing with spirit gum. Carey's only answer was a yelp of admiration as the beard, to quote his statement, "swung into place." Even the sober Bassin was pleased with the effect. The beard was youthful and slightly curly.

“Makes your ruddy eyes look blue,” said Carey, smiting him between the shoulder-blades. “Come on, you lecherous devil! You look like Priapus in person.”

•3•

The way for Bassin’s entry into the Sanctuary had been paved, by a fortunate accident, by the excuse, which Carey had made to the Leader upon leaving.

“Going to try to persuade my friend to come back with me,” he had said. “Nervous chap, and a week of the Sanctuary will set him up in health and temperament for the winter.”

So now they were received with the Leader’s blessing, and shared a hut. By the time they had taken off the trappings of civilised life and were wearing the brown blankets, which were permitted to the residents from six o’clock onwards, and in which they lay down to sleep, the colony was already at song.

Bassin and Carey seated themselves modestly at the end of the back row. Some attempt had been made, it seemed, to produce a camp-fire atmosphere at the sing-song, but the evening was not yet sufficiently advanced for the fire to look at its best. It was quite an impressive, flaming, crackling affair built up and refuelled from time to time not by the colony members but by Rover Scouts, whose Good Deed it was, every evening. They took it in turns, coming up from their camp in the valley. The voices, also, of the nudists, raised in song, were not sufficiently robust, and were far too delicately refined, to make a good effect. The general impression was that the majority of the company were where they were, and were employed as

they were employed, simply because there was nothing else to do.

The Rovers, Bassin supposed, were able only by virtue of the brown blankets to be present. He whispered this suggestion to the Leader, who was smilingly making his rounds. It was received with a wider smile and a deep nod of assent. The revels, or, as Carey preferred to call it, the seance, continued until half-past eight, and then the blanketed inmates moved in droves to the house (a strangely impressive mansion whose ground plan had originally been that of a Carthusian monastery and which had been successively built on and added to by Elizabethans, Sir Christopher Wren and, lastly, the Hell-fire Club) for hot milk and charcoal biscuits.

Carey and Bassin made a discreet withdrawal at the conclusion of the ceremonies, and were about to congratulate themselves—in fact, had begun to do so—that they had gained the trees which veiled the approach to George, the cigarettes, and the drinks, without arousing curiosity and suspicion, when their dreams were rudely shattered by a female voice, pitched low, but hideously clear.

“I say, you two,” it said. “You can’t do it. I’ve tried twice. They set kind of sentries.”

In another second she was with them. They could not see her, for it was very dark among the trees, but she put her hand suddenly on Carey’s shin, tightened her grip, and repeated her observations.

“Don’t be silly, my good child,” said her prisoner testily. “Who’s proposing to do anything?”

“You are. You had a look in your eye. I spotted it while we were singing ‘Pioneers.’ You two don’t belong here, any more than I do.”

“This sounds to me like an ally,” said Carey to Bassin. He reached out in his turn and managed to grip the girl by the elbow. “Tell me,” he said, “who you are.”

"Name's Ermyntrude," said the girl.

"Rot. I don't believe it."

"Usually known as Truda."

"All right. Take it as read. Now, Truda, listen. You are in the clutches of two dangerous, man-eating, he-men, who will have not the faintest compunction in throttling away your probably misspent and, in any case, useless life, if you make yourself the kind of nuisance that I think you're going to."

The girl giggled with gratification.

"I knew you two were the right kind," she said. "But, honestly, take my advice, you'll never do it."

"And this," said Carey, "to the man who once debagged a Proctor's bull-dog."

"Liar! I bet you didn't!"

"Well, actually, no."

"There you are! Oh, if you only knew how I've longed for, and watched out for, somebody like you two, since I've been in this ghastly hole."

"But when did you come?" asked Carey, who could not remember her voice.

"This morning. *God and the Rabbit*, brothers!" Her voice quivered with self-pity. "To think that I could have been camping with my angel Lionel!"

Carey sympathised with her, and then released her grip.

"We must be off," he said. "No, we're not trying to make a bolt up to Town, arriving back on a milk-train, or anything, really, so do let go."

"Then," said the girl, who still retained her hold on the calf of his leg with a scientific grip, which informed him that any attempt on his part to escape would be fraught with horrible agony, "you've got a private still, or something, haven't you?"

"You know," said Bassin, "we'd better let her in. She's too intelligent to be wasted."

"Speaks our language, too," said Carey admiringly. He edged a little closer to his captor, and slid an experienced arm round a smooth, slim body.

"Hell! Get away!" said the girl, unwisely letting go of his leg in order to slap his head. In a split second she had lost her prey, and the two young men were wriggling silently, agonisingly, but triumphantly away.

"You low, hornswoggling, Nazi half-breeds!" she yelled. They lay flat, but the girl did not attempt to follow them. Carey touched Bassin's arm. Somewhere in front of them somebody was signalling with an electric torch.

"Go up to him and lead him astray. It must be the sentry," said Bassin. Carey stood up and walked towards the man.

"My room-mate," he said. "Gone mad. Says he must go to London tonight, or bust. What do we do? His mother made me swear that I'd never let him out of my sight. He's on a treatment for alcohol. I don't know what will happen if he's allowed to be at large in London. He's taken ten pounds of my money. You can get an awful lot of drink for ten pounds. Think on your feet, man! This way! This way!"

By the time he had led the man sufficiently astray, Bassin had got back to their hut with four pints of ale, a hundred cigarettes, two boxes of matches, and a beer-opener, the whole in a wicker basket provided by the thoughtful George.

"And now for the wench," said Carey, whose sense of justice was elementary but sound. "If she hadn't tipped us off about the sentry we'd never have established communication with George."

He made a danger-fraught, lightning round of the girls' huts, whistling "Will ye no' come back again" outside each. The quarry, who was as intelligent as they had hoped, glided out of the third hut, put her hand over Carey's mouth, and whispered:

"What have you got? Gin?"

“Only beer and a few cigarettes,” said Carey, “but such as it is, you’re welcome. I drew the sentry, whilst Boy Scout Number One Bassin achieved the stuff.”

“I adore beer,” said the girl.

“As for gin,” said Carey earnestly, when the three of them were seated on his bed—a mattress on the floor of the hut—and the girl had just lifted her head from a long, deep drink of beer, “you leave it alone, young Truda. Time for gin when you’re a vamp of advanced years and reduced—or, rather enhanced—figure. Mother’s ruin, don’t you forget. I take it that you, so far—”

“OK, Father Time,” responded she, accepting a cigarette and a light from Bassin. “Well, thanks ever so for the party. Suppose I’d better be crawling back unless I want to be flung out of the colony for immoral behaviour. I’ll tell you what. The New England States had nothing whatever on this place when it comes to the fraternising of the young, so just watch your step, Casanova.”

“And that,” said Carey, after she had gone, “to a respectable married man and the father of a family. Never marry, Bassin. The lesser, or female, is an ungrateful sex.”

“The thing is,” said Bassin, beginning to put away the bottle and glasses, “to decide what our next move will be. Personally, I’m all for a raid on the sleeping Call, or Carn, to see what we can bounce out of him.”

“Sort of third degree, do you mean?”

“Well, it’s marvellous what you can get a man to say if you wake him up suddenly enough.”

“Heil, Hitler,” said Carey, piously.

So they sneaked out, Carey in the lead; for his previous stay at the Sanctuary had acquainted him with the position of Mr. Call’s hut.

“Remember, it’s his ears we’ve got to see,” said Bassin earnestly. “I’m heavier than you, so I sit on him whilst you take the torch and carry out the inspection. If they’re not pierced for earrings, of course we slide out muttering

apologies and saying we mistook him for our boyhood friend named Ernest. If they *are* pierced for earrings—and something tells me they will be—we invite him to come across with information about the cash-box, and we don't let up on him until we've dug something out about it. OK?"

"OK."

"Right. Let's go."

The night was still very young. It was barely ten by Carey's luminous watch when he laid a hand on Bassin's arm to indicate that they were approaching Call's hut.

One useful piece of knowledge, which Carey had gleaned on his previous stay in the Sanctuary was that Call had no companion in his hut. They approached with the greatest caution, however, the clump of flowering bushes, which beautifully but effectively screened the door.

Carey went first, and opened up the hut. The doors were self-locking, like those of hotel bedrooms, but, as Carey had managed to discover—"more crude but useful sleuthing" as he himself expressed it—it was possible to open all the doors with his own key, as every lock was precisely similar to every other lock.

Their burglarious entry did not disturb the sleeper. Whatever he had on his conscience, and whether or not he was Carn, the occupant of the hut slept deeply. It was the business of a moment to locate him, and of another, or less than another, for Bassin to sit on his head.

He was a biggish fellow, but Bassin was compact and heavy. Carey shone the torch on to the ear, which Bassin, shifting position slightly, permitted to be disclosed.

"Other one," murmured Carey. "This one fills the bill."

Bassin got up, seized the captive by the beard, and wrenched his head round. The beard, not surprisingly, came away in his hands at this treatment, and Carey, who had managed to grip the ear long enough to examine its lobe, now flashed the torch full on the beardless face before the

sudden bellow which their victim emitted brought reinforcements hastening from other huts in the vicinity.

Carey touched Bassin's arm. Bassin bumped Carn's head on the floor to give him something to think about whilst they made their escape. They were none too soon. Scarcely had they reached the bushes and hidden themselves when a mixed mob of nudists, headed, it appeared from the voice, by the older Mr. Child, came running towards Carn's hut.

Carey touched Bassin again, and, the hut having swallowed up the rescue party, the two young men went quietly back to their own.

"It occurs to me," said Carey, "that it would be just as well for us to be able to produce an alibi. I'm a marked man among some of 'em here. Let's go and dig out two girls with whom I have some slight influence, and prime them with a few well-chosen, foolproof lies against Carn's accusations tomorrow morning. Good thing we arranged you should leave your beaver here and tackle him clean-shaven. It ought to help establish our bona fidey, as my tobacconist would say."

Cordial relations were soon established with the two girls, whose huts were some distance away, and who had not heard the disturbance, and after a pleasant visit the young men went away, loudly calling their good nights (to the annoyance of the nudists in the adjacent huts), and settled down on their mattresses to discuss the evening's work.

"We didn't manage the cash-box interrogation," remarked Carey discontentedly. "I'd no idea he'd yell the place down like that."

"Do you know, I think that part of it was really a bit providential," said Bassin. "I mean, we know now that it's Carn, because of the ears. Well done, Mrs. Saxant! We should never have got on to them at all, if it hadn't been for her."

“Dirty trick of his to send those other ears,” said Carey.

“Jolly clever of your aunt to have the police re-examine them and find they weren’t pierced.”

“Jolly sensible of the police to have kept them pickled for reference!” said Carey, grinning. There was a bowl of fruit at hand. Bassin lobbed an orange.

“Chuck it,” said Carey. “Oh, no! Jolly clever of you, Bassin—no, pax, you silly ass! Keep your fruit to yourself! It’s given me an idea.”

“Tomatoes?”

“You said it, brother.”

“Can’t see the point, all the same.”

“You will. Nighty-night. Sleep well.” He drew his blanket a little more snugly about him, for they had sallied forth naked to the fray and the evening was chilly. He and Bassin were both scratched from their enforced seclusion in the bushes, but as all the nudists had lacerations, abrasions and bruises—these being the minor penalties of the Back to Nature Campaign which they imagined themselves to be waging on behalf of their fellow human beings—their wounds, as Carey pointed out, would not count against them on the morrow.

They slept well, but took the precaution, before they went to bed, of wedging a golf club under the handle of the door. Golf was recognised as a suitable nudist pastime, and the Sanctuary had its own nine-hole course. Nothing disturbed the night, however. Bassin was first awake, woke Carey, according to agreement, and they went to the lake for a swim.

Although it was only six o’clock, the lake was dotted with the heads of swimmers. The water was very cold. They looked for Carn, but he was not there. The majority of the swimmers, in fact, were girls.

“Always the harder sex,” said Carey, diving almost on top of one in order to make her shriek. Having achieved this desirable result, he swam very fast to the opposite end of

the lake, the girl pursuing him. Bassin, not nearly so enterprising, took a running dive off a springboard and solemnly swam up and down until he was tired. Then he got out and dried himself. Carey, who had got out long before, was playing round games, involving a good deal of pushing and giggling, with a group of girls and one rather pale young man whose contribution to the general joy was a weary but almost incessant cry of "Rah! Rah! Rah!"

Bassin watched them for a moment, and then trotted, as seriously as he had swum, round the edge of the meadow in which the lake was situated. When he had done about a mile in this fashion, he performed a solemn ritual of exercises, and then waited for Carey.

Carey broke from the bevy, and offered to race him up to the house for breakfast.

"Not that there's much to race for," he admitted, when Bassin declined to take part in the contest. "Grapefruit or stewed figs, porridge, boiled or poached eggs, tomatoes, toast, marmalade."

"Ah, yes. Tomatoes," said Bassin. "What's the giddy scheme?"

"Wait and see, big boy. Hey! Quick! Bag the last two places at the top table! The Leader grubs there in person, and the helpings are just that one most desirable degree more lavish than elsewhere in this ruddy orphanage."

They secured the places in the teeth of other claimants, and a little later were scanning the menu, which was exactly as Carey had quoted, except that there were also nuts.

During the meal Bassin noticed that his companion had a more than usually roving eye. He ate, too, as though he were in danger of losing a train. Suddenly he got up, walked to a side-table on which were fruit and salads, picked up a couple of good-sized tomatoes, and walked over to another of the long tables.

Bassin glanced at his own watch, which (in defiance he supposed, of the true spirit of nudism) he had elected to

wear. He thought that Carey was planning to get back to George before the hour of eight, at which time George was due to take the car back to the "Lion," so he finished his own breakfast, and made for the door. Nobody, he noticed, sat a moment longer at meals than was necessary. Some even walked to the door finishing the last mouthful as they went. Some took fruit or nuts out with them. It was all very informal and, to that extent, enjoyable.

He had reached the door and was looking round for Carey to join him when a singular and impressive scene was presented. Carey, tomatoes in hand, was leaning on the back of the chair of the bearded man whom Bassin (safe behind the ramparts of his own large, curly beard) recognized for the man who had fired at him from the motor cycle. The man was conversing thickly, and with a marked German accent—the whole effect very different from the cultured voice of Senss—about Waterford glass, about which he knew a good deal.

Suddenly, Carey tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hey! Just a minute!" he said. The man swung round, suddenly caught sight of the tomatoes and, with a scream, ducked his head aside, covering his beard and the lower part of his face with his table napkin.

Carey politely withdrew the offending spheres, apologized very charmingly for having startled the gentleman, and order was soon restored.

Bassin, not wishing to attract attention to himself during this interesting scene, had gone outside, and, Carey joining him, began to trot towards their hut. Once there, both seized their clothes and raced for the shelter of the woods.

None too soon did they plunge in among the trees, for the bearded man went by the huts at a very creditable speed. He was muttering angrily.

"Gone to get his gun," said Carey. "Come on."

George was glad to see them. He had had a nice sleep, he said.

“Have another,” said Carey. “Shove over, George. I’ll drive.”

Mrs. Bradley was seated in the lounge. She had been up since half-past six, but had not gone in to breakfast, foreseeing that the two young men would join her.

She went out to the yard when she heard the car draw up in front of the house, and told George to get his breakfast and then go straight to bed. Then she went in to greet Bassin and her nephew.

“It’s him all right,” said Carey. “But we’re not convinced about Senss, except that the fellow Bassin plastered with the tomatoes is German. But he talks with a thick sort of accent, not a bit like Senss’s voice, Bassin says. However, he’s scared stiff of tomatoes. Got a permanent complex, I should say.”

They described the incident, and then worked backwards to the events of the night.

“It’s a case for the police all right,” said Bassin. “They can go up there and nab Carn, if only on the excuse that he’s supposed to be dead, and why isn’t he?”

Mrs. Bradley was so much impressed by this profound argument that, cackling gently, she begged them to excuse her, and rang up the chief constable.

“As for the little girl at the duck-pond,” she said on her return, “I was able to ascertain, without leading questions, that it was a heavily bearded man who bribed her to point out the wrong direction if anybody asked her which way he had taken with the cash-box, and that he reminded her of Santa Claus, in whom she does not believe.”

“He had got the cash-box, then?” said Bassin.

“Did you swim in your beard?” asked Mrs. Bradley, with a little hoot of laughter. Bassin modestly declared that he had retained his beard in the water and added that the paper of directions, inside the box in which Mrs. Bradley had presented it to him, had declared, upon the sworn oath of

the manufacturers, that the spirit gum supplied for fixing was waterproof.

“Actually, it only mentioned one’s bath,” said Bassin, “and seemed to take it for granted that one bathed in public, as it were. So I thought that if the gum would stand up to hot water in a bath, it would stand up to cold water in a lake. Which it did.”

“He looked quite delicious,” said Carey. “There’s a lot to be said for beards from an aesthetic standpoint. One understands why the ancient Assyrians, Persians, Babylonians, and Greeks went to such trouble with theirs, although, of course, one can argue that a beard all little ringlets is definitely a sign of decadence, but then, I think all art is. Look at virile modern Germany, and then take a slant at Surrealism. By the way, the Surrealists have got a show at the Long Street Galleries. It would interest you, Aunt Adela.”

“But is Surrealism art?” asked Bassin solemnly.

“No. It’s a kind of camouflage,” replied Carey. “Bless you, bless you, my child,” he added brokenly. The next moment they were locked together on the floor, Carey shrieking loudly and realistically for the chambermaid.

Mrs. Bradley left the undignified scene, and went in to breakfast, at which the young men, having brushed their clothes and hair and straightened their ties, ate eggs, bacon, kidneys, tomatoes, and sausages as though they had had no food for at least a fortnight.

• CHAPTER 12 •

Conclusions of an Expert

“And as he went, there suddenly met him in the road a dwarf, who struck his horse so violently upon the head with a great staff, that he leaped backwards a spear’s length.”

• 1 •

The police, although they were early upon the scene, did not find Mr. Carn at the Sanctuary, neither was it easy to discover by what route or by what means he had fled. As to the supposed Mr. Senss, the inspector made short work of him. Bassin accompanied the police, and, in his presence, Mr. Smith was requested to remove his beard.

“But my beard,” said he, outraged, “is my own. I cannot remove him at will.”

“Come, sir,” said the inspector reasonably, “this gentleman charges you with having fired at him from a revolver on two occasions. If you won’t assist us we shall have to proceed with the charge.”

“Oh, well, then,” said Mr. Smith, “you will please to give me time. He is false, but he is particularly adhesive, isn’t it?”

The inspector insisted upon accompanying him to his hut. There he removed the beard by scientific means, and

disclosed that he was indeed Senss.

"I hope my good friend, Mr. Bassin, of Messrs. Bassin, Lillibud and Bassin, is satisfied now that I was not the person who attacked him," he said, smiling amiably.

"Oh, rather, quite, of course," stammered Bassin, this form of reply, with all its implications of his own confusion and Senss, complete innocence, having been agreed upon between himself and the inspector. "It was simply the beard which made matters so confusing."

"So many of us here wear false beards," said Senss, charming and courteous. "It was a very natural mistake, Mr. Bassin, I am sure."

He bowed. Bassin bowed. The inspector did not bow, but managed to look as though he was about to bow. The Leader, who had accompanied them, bowed.

"Still, your chief enemy, Mr. Simplon, is out of action," said Bassin.

"So? I knew I had not seen him lately. But you are not right to suppose him my enemy. We enjoy much conversation together, both exiles, you understand?"

"Oh, yes, I understand. But you seem to have told Mrs. Saxant a different tale."

"Ah, the ladies! Who shall understand their hearts? They live for romance, isn't it? To Mrs. Saxant, it is quite true, I have painted my poor friend a monster. She demands to be interested, so—I interest her. She wishes thrills, so I thrill her with the horror of my poor friend's circumstances. Which of my stories did she tell you?"

"The screamingly funny one about your brother," said Bassin, without moving a muscle of his face except those required for actually speaking the words.

"My brother? So. She is a beautiful woman," he added.

"And terribly silly," said Bassin.

"Pardon me, sir," said the inspector, "but is this *getting* us anywhere?"

“No. I don’t think so. Good-bye, Mr. Senss. Please accept my most heartfelt apologies. In fact”—he suddenly shot his arm out—“accept a tomato for luck!”

The man drew back, with a kind of howl in which anger and apprehension were very prettily blended. The inspector, impressed by this demonstration, put a hand on his arm.

“Best come along of me, sir. There’s one or two things we’d like to ask you.”

Senss gave a scream, and tried to wrench himself away, but it was of no use, and the last Bassin saw of him was the back of his head, and that was almost obscured by the shoulders of two large constables who walked one on either side of him.

“Poor devil,” said Carey. “His nerves must be in rags. He’ll probably be bound over, or something, I should think. They’ll never jug a man in his state, surely.”

“Why, what do you think his state is?” asked Bassin, interested. “Wonder where Carn’s got to? Why do you suppose he decided we’d rumbled him?”

“Oh, well, the ears, of course. Naturally he’d guess what we were after. Watch your step would be my advice, and I mean to take it myself. Carn, if what we believe is true, has got two pretty beastly, well-planned murders on his tally-stick already. I suppose the next job for the police will be to turn Mrs. Saxant just about inside out. They’ll threaten to shove her in the dock beside him if she doesn’t come across with all she knows, and, if I’ve sized the lady up rightly, she won’t care how fast she talks.”

He had done Mrs. Saxant an injustice, however. She admitted to the police that Carn had had his ears pierced, and agreed (thankfully, she said, with considerable spirit) that if the ears sent to her had not been so pierced they could not have been Carn’s ears, but beyond this one solitary admission she refused to say anything more except in the presence of her lawyer. Moreover, she refused to

budge from the account she had already given of her pre-arranged meeting with Carn.

"We drove, and we talked things over, and we both agreed that he couldn't leave his wife—he was fond of her, you know—and then at about three o'clock he left me, and I drove back here. That's really all I know."

"I'm suggesting," said the inspector, "that you did not return here immediately, but that you drove round to the other side of the church near Carn's house, waited for him, and then drove off with him and the missing cash-box."

"There's not a word of truth in it," she said. "Ask my servants. Ask anybody what time I came in."

As the inspector had already done this, he saw no point in doing it again, so he bade her a civil good day and departed, and the police set to work to explore all avenues, as Carey said, in an attempt to find Carn.

"Even when they catch him," Bassin remarked, "they haven't got much of a case. Wonder when Jonathan Mabb will be released? Whatever the police thought they had against him for the murder of Carn, they can hardly hold on to him now that the corpse turns out to be some bloke quite unknown. Well, we shall have to leave said bloke's identification to the police; that much is certain."

The police investigations succeeded where a merely amateur enquiry such as that carried on by Bassin and Carey Lestrangle would have been bound to fail. By the middle of the third week after it had been made clear that Carn was still alive and that the handless, earless body was that of some other unfortunate, the inspector had identified the dead man, had made a dossier of as much of his life as was important for police purposes, and had even discovered where Carn had kept him hidden whilst he was feeding and grooming him preparatory to murdering him. A search which began at Hammersmith led back to Princes Risborough and from there to Oxford, and diligent and painstaking enquiry elicited the fact that Carn had several times seen the man,

when both of them were younger, and (injudiciously, although he could not have known that at the time, and had probably forgotten the circumstances later) had commented to an acquaintance upon the likeness the man bore to himself, and had presented the man with five pounds.

Tramps notoriously stick to their own routes, dosshouses, and even haystacks and ditches, and Carn had had no difficulty in finding this tramp again. The only snag, as Bassin said later, would have been to discover that he was dead of tuberculosis or pneumonia—"regular way for them sort to go," added the sergeant—but Carn's victim had been of sound constitution, and, what was as valuable, he had never forgotten the five pounds, so that when his benefactor developed other, more fundamental, but still kindly eccentricities, such as providing him with food, shelter, and clothing, he was already conditioned to the belief that the madman meant him no harm but intended to benefit him.

Nobody missed the poor tramp except one or two of his cronies who had been accustomed to encounter him at certain seasons of the year at certain dosshouses or in certain casual wards, and those who did miss him never dreamed of mentioning his absence to the police. The police, however, had found the lonely house near Abingdon where the man had lived a whole winter, spring, and early summer at Carn's expense, and where he had been murdered. Unfortunately for Carn, the tramp had once or twice entertained a couple of cronies there—a fact which Carn never knew, but which ultimately led the police to the house, where a slightly bloodstained pillow, hidden at the bottom of a wardrobe completed the evidence.

"But why," said the inspector, addressing Mrs. Saxant once more, "should he murder his wife?"

She replied that she could not say. The police, in short, were again confronted by what they considered the entirely inadequate motive for the murders. Mrs. Saxant was

youngish, pretty—"I suppose you'd call her charming," the inspector had once observed to Carey, but Carey had replied that personally he should not—and she had what the sergeant, who appeared to be an authority on such matters, described as "plenty of S.A. or It, sir."

Yet, confronted with all of these desirable and exciting qualities in the very person of their possessor, the inspector still grunted and stroked his chin, and then, as one who has come to a sudden decision, bade her good-bye again.

"That's the rudest man I ever met," she observed to her husband, later on. Geoffrey Saxant also grunted. He was very much annoyed by the inspector's visits, and was also feeling extremely worried by the behaviour of his partner Kurt Senss.

"Kurt has got Mr. Thomas Carn to agree that we shall advertise for Carn to make known his intentions regarding the publication of *The Open-Bellied Mountain* with a statement to the effect that if we hear nothing from him within the next ten days we shall send out the hundred copies, as agreed, and send Mr. Thomas Carn the bill," he said.

"I think," began Mrs. Saxant. Then she bit her lip, and, without finishing the sentence, went to her bedroom to telephone. She called up the "Lion," where Mrs. Bradley was still in residence, and asked to speak to Bassin. When she had given him the news, and told him to tell the inspector, she went back to her husband. He seemed particularly disturbed, and blurted out, when he saw her:

"The whole thing is a most confounded muddle, Kurt Senss is clearly going mad. For some reason of his own he's crazy to publish Carn's book, and the thought that he can't until the experts decide whether Carn's signature on that letter is genuine, makes him get up and hop round the office, swearing in German and making these ridiculous schemes for getting out the book. It'd be funny if it weren't so damned perplexing."

"I should advertise, darling. That letter can't mean much now, if Fortinbras is still alive."

"Of course it can! Don't be a fool, my dear! It can mean as much or as little as it did before. Fellow being dead or not being dead has nothing whatever to do with it. And how can we advertise? Fellow can't possibly risk an answer. The police are after him. Now don't cry, my good girl. I know you liked the fellow, but the fact remains that he's a murderer. That's what we've got to face. I'd still like to know what it all means, too, damned and parboiled if I wouldn't."

He went out, and Mrs. Saxant, like the inspector, wondered why Carn had killed his wife and staged this elaborate disappearance (which certainly had not come off as he had intended), when he was welcome to her favours at all times without the bother and expense of having to keep her or live with her. She, again like the inspector, was cynical, and although she and Fortinbras had always found each other good fun, she did not, and never would, believe that he would commit two murders in the name of love.

"Besides, there's still poor dear Geoffrey, when all's said and done," she thought. "Why didn't Fortinbras kill *him*?"

This point, of course, had also occurred to the inspector.

"Take Mr. Saxant. Where does *he* come in?" he demanded oracularly of the sergeant. The sergeant, who did not recognise the nature of the question, treated it as a straightforward interrogation, and replied.

"Well, sir, to a happily married man, such as yourself might be, that would appear to be quite a point."

Perceiving that it was a point, which the sergeant proposed to elucidate, the inspector reached for his hat, said, "Can it!" very abruptly, and nearly knocked over the chief constable, who was coming up the steps of the police station, having just got out of his car.

"Never mind, never mind, Inspector," he said, pushing the inspector in the back as a means of persuading him to reenter the police station. "That German fellow whom

Beatrice—whom Mrs. Bradley found in the chimney at the ‘Lion’—remember? Well, the doctor says it’s all right to interview him. Think he’ll tell the truth, hey?”

“Why, yes, sir, I don’t see why he shouldn’t.”

“Nor do I. Nor do I. Now what do we want to know exactly, eh? Look here, I’ll leave it to you. Got to pop along. Appointment. Late already. You go. Get him to tell you—”

“Who laid him out, sir, I suppose?”

“Oh, no! Oh, no! Beatrice says it don’t matter who laid him out. She knows all that. What she’s after is why he was put in the chimney at the ‘Lion.’ *Why the chimney?* Got it?”

“Yes, sir,” said the inspector, woodenly.

“Good-bye, then. Go now. Go now. Dashed clever old girl. Knew my mother, you know. Fine generation. Shan’t see another one like it.”

He leapt for his car, and drove away. The inspector put on his hat and drove to the County Hospital, which happened to be half a mile off.

•2•

The inspector was not Mr. Simplon’s only visitor. By the time that he had been shown the way to the ward and had arrived at the door, Mrs. Bradley was already seated at the bedside of the patient, and was listening to a long, involved, excited tale of his ill-treatment since he had been admitted to the institution. It proved, later, that he thought she was the lady almoner, and that he was making what he obviously regarded as a legitimate complaint in the proper quarter.

Having extended her sympathy to the quivering little man, she led him to talk about his injuries, and within two minutes Mr. Simplon-Bonner was recounting to her a

singular history. The inspector, seating himself beside an adjacent bed, whose unfortunate occupant had no other visitor, turned his back on the excited little narrator and took down what he said.

At the end of three-quarters of an hour he had the whole story. It had begun, apparently, on the day that Mr. Simplon had encountered Bassin on the landing outside Senss's door. Mr. Simplon had not like Bassin, it appeared. Next, the incredibly stupid young man had attempted to commit suicide under the wheels of Mr. Simplon's car. After that, the fun, apparently, had become fast and furious. The young man had lured him to Senss's office by writing a note, purporting to come from Senss himself, requesting a meeting.

Mr. Simplon and Mr. Senss often played chess together, it seemed, when Mr. Senss was not busy. The game took place always in office hours. They did not meet at one another's houses.

The message, however, had not come from Senss at all, but had been written by the young man on notepaper he must have stolen whilst Mr. Senss was interviewing him. He, Mr. Simplon, in his innocence, had gone, by night, to the office, had been locked in, and, whilst he was there, unable to escape, the young man had set fire to the premises.

He (Mr. Simplon) escaped by leaping from the top of the fire escape to the ground, sustaining injuries. The next thing he knew was that he was in the hospital. And that was all that he did know.

At that the inspector swung round on him.

"You won't mind signing the statement, sir?"

The effect of those few and simple words from a man whom the patient had tolerantly regarded as a visitor to the hospital was frightful. Mrs. Bradley, afraid that Mr. Simplon might do himself an injury, summoned the sister, and that autocrat soon calmed the little man. Mrs. Bradley and the inspector took their leave, the latter in some haste (he felt

that the sister did not like him), Mrs. Bradley sympathetically. But they met in the vestibule.

"Coming my way, madam, by any chance?" the inspector gallantly enquired.

"If you're going to discuss the statement made by that admirable, formidable little man, certainly," Mrs. Bradley answered. She sent her car home and got in beside the inspector.

"Lies, I suppose, ma'am?"

"Most of it, I think. One true thing was that he genuinely confuses my nephew, Carey Lestrangle, with young Mr. Bassin. Carey borrowed a suit, which Bassin had been wearing when he encountered Mr. Simplon first. The premises of Saxant and Senss *were* burnt, of course."

She gave the inspector a short account of the activities of herself and her nephew on the occasion of the fire at the printing press.

"Oh? So this joker was responsible for bribing the office boy to set light to the place, was he? I'll have a word with that boy," said the inspector. He tried to convey to Mrs. Bradley the fact that he thought she ought to have reported all this before, but she remained bland and appeared to have not the faintest suspicion that she had failed in her duty as a citizen, so, not caring to voice his opinion to a lady who had known the chief constable's mother, he changed the subject by asking:

"And what would be his idea, do you suppose, ma'am, in setting fire to the printing works like that?"

"Unless I am much mistaken, Inspector, his object was to destroy (since he could not locate and steal it) the corrected proof of Mr. Carn's book, *The Open-Bellied Mountain*."

"Oh, so that's where it all fits in," said the inspector, relieved to find that the jig-saw had some meaning; although, at the moment, that meaning was particularly obscure.

"Just so. Now it seems most likely that Mr. Simplon was set upon and injured and put in the chimney simply to get him out of the way."

"Attempted murder, ma'am?"

"I hardly think so, Inspector. Somebody clearly wanted him out of the way until *The Open-Bellied Mountain* was published."

"But it isn't published, ma'am, and here's this hirsute little liar ready with his tall story—which we can't altogether disprove—"

"Pardon me, Inspector. 'Hirsute little liar.' Thank you so much. My nephew collects such *bon mots*. You were saying?"

But the inspector had lost the thread, as Mrs. Bradley intended he should, and observed:

"As long as something comes in somewhere, I suppose we can say we're on the trail. But I wish I could lay my optics on Mr. Carn."

•3•

"The most interesting point," Mrs. Bradley telephoned to Bassin, who was back in London, "is that Mr. Simplon-Bonner should have told so much of the truth. It indicates that he cannot be completely in league with Mr. Senss and that disposes of one theory completely."

"Hard luck," said Bassin sympathetically.

"Not at all. Merely a clearing of the decks for action."

"Are you going to confront Simplon with the fact that we know his name is Bonner, and see how he reacts?"

"Well, I could do so, child, but only on the clear understanding that you remain where you are, a sleeping partner, at present, in the enterprise."

“Mother’s little boy in person,” said Bassin, grinning into the receiver. Mrs. Bradley sensed the grin, although she could not see it, and cackled in reply.

“As for you,” Bassin continued, “I think you ought to lie low as well, once you’ve put it across Simplon.”

“I may do so, child. Good-bye.”

Her gleanings at the hospital, from which, it appeared Mr. Simplon was to be discharged on the following day, were so extraordinary, however, that she decided at the conclusion of it, to take Bassin’s advice, and so returned to the Stone House at Wandles Parva.

●4●

The case against Carn, so far, was unsatisfactory, the inspector decided, in that it depended entirely upon the death of the tramp. Here the murderer had been so abominably careless that it was possible, the inspector thought (having had some experience of barristers and their ways), that a clever defending counsel might point out to the jury that circumstances must be against the prisoner in that no man would have been guilty of the incredible folly of stabbing the tramp with the very remarkable and easily traceable dagger (“and did, indeed—we do not seek to deny it—belong to the accused”) which could have been seen, by any and all, hanging on the wall of Carn’s study.

As the death of the tramp was clearly only a preliminary to the murder of the wife, the inspector, a very cautious man, thought that the case against Carn could be made to appear much stronger, so far as the jury were concerned, if Carn were indicted for the murder of Mrs. Carn rather than of an unknown, probably undesirable vagrant.

The inspector could not help but feel that, whereas all human life may be equally sacred in the eyes of God and of the law, the average British citizen would be far more likely to be on the side of the wife than of the tramp.

With these simple yet profound reflections still in his mind, the inspector again hit the trail, and again took as his starting point the hour at which Carn presumably had left Mrs. Saxant on the day of his wife's death.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Bradley, who, like Sherlock Holmes (her only resemblance, probably, to that great and unorthodox investigator), did not need to be on the scene of the crime in order to continue her investigations, having left Mr. Simplon somewhat hurriedly, took a small table, a garden chair, her note-book, a large scribbling block, and her sunglasses into the very pleasant, secluded lawn of her house and worked out the case all over again from the beginning.

It was psychologically very interesting, she felt, that the man who had planned, down to the smallest detail, the transformation of the tramp, his subsequent death, the murder of Mrs. Carn so that, even now, the police could not trace, with any complete and unarguable certainty, the movements of the murderer on the late afternoon and early evening of the day of the crime, should, in the last resort, have been stupid enough to use a readily identifiable stiletto for the one murder, and have left so obvious and yet so unsatisfactory a clue as his attachment to Mrs. Saxant as a motive for the other.

Her very instincts, apart from her psychological knowledge, informed her that something rang false. Even the inspector, that hard-working, yet scarcely inspired, although indubitably conscientious official, was not altogether satisfied with the case. She realised that the inspector's qualms were not the same as her own. He wanted Carn indicted for the murder of the wife, not for the murder of the tramp. Mrs. Bradley, rolling a sheet of

scribbling paper into a ball and tossing it to the kitten—not her own, but it came into her garden when it was tired of the Vicarage children—decided, with energy and determination, that she wanted Carn indicted for neither or both of the murders. The snag in the first case (the wife) was the hopelessly inadequate motive. In the second (the tramp) it was the weapon.

She compared and contrasted these snags. The trouble was that they seemed to have little connection.

Coming to a sudden decision she rang a small handbell. Célestine always insisted upon placing this at the corner of the garden table, although was not Mrs. Bradley's habit to make use of it to summon her servants on to the lawn. If she wanted them (in Carey's words) she went and shouted.

Célestine hurried out.

"The 'ot sun! Madame est malade! But, not an 'at!"

"Don't babble, child," said Mrs. Bradley amiably. "Send somebody over to the Vicarage to find out whether Mr. Wells is at liberty."

"I bring 'im back wiz me, zat one. 'E 'as no occupations, nevaire," observed Célestine. Mrs. Bradley gazed benignly, through sunglasses, which turned it brownish-green, at the clear sheet of scribbling paper before her, and then, as though inspired by its smooth, bland, pristine innocence, she scribbled a few words in her note-book.

The Reverend Noel Wells, having left Célestine far behind him by providing himself with a short cut, repeated the successful experiment by hurdling as neatly over Mrs. Bradley's four-foot hedge as he had hurdled over his own.

"You wanted me?" he said. He was a pleasant, sincere young man, and Mrs. Bradley, who had known him for years, had been responsible, in her own way, for obtaining for him the living at Wandles Parva. Her friend, the previous incumbent, a scholarly, kindly, absent-minded man named Broome, had been made a rural dean. Mrs. Bradley always valued Noel Wells's advice and comments because he was

stupid, and could never be persuaded that he was able to see through a brick wall, by the eye of faith or by any other means. His reactions, therefore, were what, for scientific purposes, could be called constant, and, as such, they were extremely valuable, especially, as she was wont to observe, to Mrs. Bradley herself, whose training had proceeded, largely, on the assumption that brick walls do not exist.

"Dear child," she said, for she was very fond of him, "have you time to listen to a story? Not a long story—ten minutes, say, or less, if you prefer it."

"No, honestly, don't cut it short. This case of yours, is it? I'd love to hear about it. I presume the chap didn't do it?"

"Now, what on earth," said Mrs. Bradley, startled, "can you possibly mean by that?"

Noel Wells grinned.

"I do often hit the nail on the head," he said. "The purest accident, of course. Do tell me all about everything."

"Very well, child. But your preconceived ideas are disconcerting, and are probably prejudicial."

"Not at all. My mind is a blank."

Mrs. Bradley would not, for reasons of kindness, have chosen this way of expressing a known fact, but as it had been so expressed, she accepted it with a cackle of appreciation.

"A man of about forty-eight was happily married to a woman of about his own age. Later he had a love affair, of a trivial but pleasant character, with a married woman some dozen years his junior, wife of a man with whom he was on ordinarily friendly terms.

"About a year ago it occurred to the hero of this tale that it would be a good plan to get rid of his wife. She knew of the affair with the other woman. There is, however, no evidence that she made herself unduly irritating about it.

"The idea was that the husband, having killed his wife, should make it appear that he also had been murdered. It was all to look like a plot. He made friends with a tramp,

bought him a cottage, and, in short, persuaded him to adopt a static instead of a nomadic existence. Then he killed him by piercing him through the ear with a long thin stiletto, which he kept in a conspicuous position in his own house.

“Later he wrote threatening letters to himself, his wife, and his servants, created something of a domestic crisis by walking hatless out of his home when lunch was within ten minutes of being served, then went out with his paramour for a drive in her car, returned in the early afternoon, and hid, whilst a young solicitor interviewed his wife on the subject of the anonymous letters. Then, when he had seen the young solicitor depart for the village, he broke a window and killed his wife by hitting her on the temple with an iron cash-box in which were the corrected proofs of a scurrilous essay he had written. This essay he proposed to publish at his own expense.

“Then he bribed a little girl, daughter of his neighbour, a farmer, to mislead the police or any other enquirers about the direction he had taken upon leaving the house with the cash-box. He was heavily bearded (instead of being only lightly bearded, as was his custom) and the girl, an intelligent, outspoken, dependable kind of child, beautifully uninhibited by moral sense or any false feeling of social responsibility, accepted the bribe, misdirected the police and others, but probably recognised the man, in spite of the disguise.

“He then drove off in a car which, except that it was not his own, has not yet been identified, and, a short time afterwards, drew attention to the fact that he had been killed by sending his ears to his lady-love at such a time that she was compelled to open the parcel in front of guests who, thereupon, and quite involuntarily, became witnesses of the fact that the ears had been received. He concluded by cutting off his hand in a guillotine worked by a young fellow who had had one or two arguments with him about the composition and personnel of the local cricket team.

“The hand and ears were really those of the tramp he had previously befriended, and whose body the police discovered in a coke-heap, in front of the entrance to the packing department of the large printing works at which the young guillotine-minder was employed. As the boy had no alibi for the business, he was arrested, but, for lack of evidence, has been released. The police have just” (she had heard from the chief constable that morning) “uncovered the whole story of the Cinderella-tramp, a warrant is out for the man’s arrest, he was last seen at a nudist colony very near his own home, and he has since disappeared.”

Having concluded this extraordinary history she sat back, folded her hands, nodded her head like a mandarin, and smiled gently.

Young Noel Wells bent and tickled the kitten, which had forgotten the ball of paper and was bored.

“Funny thing,” he said. “I mean, the tramp business would have been grand if his motive had been a good one instead of so terribly bad, of course, don’t you think?”

“You infer, child?”

“No, I don’t actually, you know, but I just meant what a grand opportunity it would be for a man with a bit of spare cash and a good heart, to experiment with the idea of finding out whether, under properly decent, comfortable and, as it were, unsupervised conditions, it’s possible to make a tramp not a tramp, so to speak. I mean, when I did slum curating, I always got a sort of impression that there were slum-ites and, virtually, non-slum-ites, if you take me. I mean, there were the people—all social reformers know them—they’re the real heart-breakers—who, no matter where you put them, or how good the conditions, would again be living like pigs inside three months. Then, one can’t help feeling—I mean, look about you at some of the council housing estates—there are people who are slum-ites from accident, not design. People who—”

“Forgive me for interrupting you, child,” said Mrs. Bradley. “I must telephone Mr. Justus Bassin, of Messrs. Bassin, Lillibud and Bassin—”

“Solicitors, I take it,” said Noel Wells intelligently. “Don’t tell me that any chance remark of mine—I must be Watson and Captain Hastings in person,” he concluded, patting himself modestly on the chest. “Oh, yes, and that reminds me—” He gazed admiringly at the retreating form of his neighbour and close friend as she walked briskly towards the house, then settled his thin body in his deckchair to await her return.

Five minutes later Célestine came out with a tray. On it reposed a coconut and a cigar.

“Madame sends her compliments, monsieur,” she remarked, “and begs monsieur to take his choice of the *cadeaux*. I myself believe,” she added darkly, “that madame amuses herself.”

• CHAPTER 13 •

The Moving Finger

“‘Sir,’ said she, ‘be of good heart, and tomorrow, at the dawn of day, ye shall know more.’”

Bassin knocked at the door of his father’s office.

“Mrs. Bradley has just rung up about the Carn business, sir. Mind if I run down to Wandles to see her?”

“Wandles?” said his father. “Used to know the vicar there once. Fellow named Broome. Cricketer. Well, good-bye, my boy. Mrs. Carpenter will miss you. She was coming in today to alter her will.”

His son grinned, ill-wished Mrs. Carpenter briefly and sincerely, and caught the train of the day with five minutes to spare. He reached the Stone House at teatime. Mrs. Bradley was having tea on the lawn. He liked thin bread and butter, cucumber sandwiches, and Henri’s little cakes, and made a good tea with Mrs. Bradley’s basilisk but approving eye on him. Then he said simply:

“I seem to have made a few bloomers.”

“Sins of omission, child. Very important ones, too. The worst of it is,” she added very sternly indeed, “that I can’t be sure that those you remember are all that you have committed.”

Célestine, giving the young man a pleased smile, for, as she observed to Henri, who generously concurred in the observation, she also recognised a good young man when

she saw one, and this one, he was, of a verity, charming, insouciant, and brave, went in again.

"Now, child," said Mrs. Bradley. "I must leave it to you. Begin at the beginning and recite to me all the bits that, in your experience and opinion, don't fit."

"Right. Well, of course, as you say—"

"No, no. The social experiments of Mr. Carn are not the beginning, child."

"Oh, I see. Well—" He put his chin on his fist, his elbow on the table, and brooded. "Well, there was the way she—Mrs. Carn—thought it might be a woman."

"Expound, child."

"Can't. She merely said that it must be somebody of his own kind—meaning somebody in the literary world, she said—who would have sent those anonymous letters. Then I began talking about this mysterious 'he' and she broke in and said it could just as well have been a 'she.' Is that any good?"

"No, child. Besides, you told me that before. But don't be discouraged. Go on."

"Yes, well, the next thing—oh, there was one rather odd thing. I never thought twice about it, though, because I was all on another tack, you understand."

Mrs. Bradley nodded.

"You can moan at me, if you like," said Bassin generously. "Now I come to think of it, it does become somewhat rummy. I went to see Senss to get that copy of the uncorrected galleys and met the other little German bloke, Simplon, at the top of the stairs. Well, I don't really know what made me do it—it was fearfully crude—but his whole demeanour was so sort of comically Teutonic, if you know what I mean—that before I realised I was doing it, I'd said, loud and clear, after I'd greeted him: 'Heil, Hitler.'"

"Yes, child?"

"Well, don't they usually 'Heil, Hitler' back again? This bloke, singularly, didn't. He merely replied: 'Ach,

Berggheist!' Do the Nazis refer to Hitler as a mountain-sprite, do you know?"

"The missing link," said Mrs. Bradley placidly, adding it to her notes.

"Me, do you mean? Yes, I'm afraid you're right. It ought to have struck me all of a heap when I heard it, instead of only now, when you've already caught me out about the book."

"I didn't mean you, child. And there is no need to reproach yourself any more. The account of Carn's social experiments which you turned over whilst you were looking for the manuscript and typescripts of *The Open-Bellied Mountain* could have had no possible significance for you at that time."

"But where's all this leading?"

"You know, as well as I do."

"You mean that it isn't Simplon who is the Nazi agent. It is Senss."

"It begins to look like it, child."

"Then I bet Carn is in with him. If he is, then the publication of Carn's anti-Jewish book would fit in. You know, that's been nagging at me all the time. He that is not with us is against us. That sort of stuff. Of course, we do know that Senss has been laying for me ever since he realised that he'd given away the Simplon-Bonner stuff, and, come to think of it, the treatment of Simplon, smashing him up and shoving him down the chimney, was more than a bit Nazi. In fact, the things falls into place. But how does it affect the main issue?"

"That remains to be seen. This much we can be sure of: Carn, whether he's a murderer or not, must be the victim of a plot. Because we feel that this is so, we can understand and explain that which, otherwise, would be incomprehensible."

"Such as?"

“The foolishness of Carn—using that dagger, for instance, and killing his wife when no one but he could possibly have taken such a risk.”

“Do you think the affair between Carn and Mrs. Saxant had any bearing at all, then, on the whole business?”

“Possibly it had. Senss, it seems, was in love with Mrs. Saxant himself. I think this may well have had some bearing on his actions.”

“So he isn’t a refugee? When did you suspect him?”

“From the first, because I did not see how he could hope to incriminate Mr. Simplon with the Nazis, if he himself were a candidate for a concentration camp.”

“If—say that again, please, slowly.”

“Well, child, it stands to reason. The most important point, in all that we have been able to discover, is that Simplon’s real name is Bonner. That fact superseded all questions of marital jealousy, anti-Semitic literature, anonymous letters, and all the obvious motives for the murders. So I asked myself why the name had so much significance. Mind this: I still don’t know. There are a good many problems to be solved, I think, before the whole explanation of the relationship between Simplon and Senss is vouchsafed to us.”

“But you think now that Senss never had a brother killed in a concentration camp, and all that?”

“I think it highly unlikely, child. Consider the facts: Senss is a master printer. He explains that a Nazi agent is watching him all the time. Now a printing press is almost as terrible and powerful a weapon as a broadcasting station, and I am prepared to declare that no political agent of the type which Simplon was supposed to be would have left a violent anti-Nazi in charge of a dangerous weapon for anti-Nazi propaganda if he could have done anything to prevent it.”

“Senss, as an enemy of the present regime in Germany, therefore, although by no means an impossible conception,

was one which I found strangely perturbing, because it did not seem probable. Probability is a great touchstone, child."

"But, then, why should Carn, if he murdered Mrs. Carn, have made off with the cash-box? Fingerprints and bloodstains?"

"No, I don't think so. He probably wore gloves, anyway, to handle the box. Fingerprints, in any case, are not of significance unless they can be traced to their owner. The whole fingerprint system depends upon the police being able to recognise the fingerprints when they find them."

"But are you sure it couldn't have been Senss who stole the cash-box? The child said a man with a beard. It could equally well have been Senss."

"On the other hand, child, there would seem to be no reason why he should steal a proof of which he already had a copy at the press."

"No. But we know that was a blind, whichever of them stole it, because the same would apply to Carn. I'd better go down to the place again, I should think, and see what else I can find out."

"First," said Mrs. Bradley, "I will write Mr. Senss a letter. I will tell him that all is known, and that if he kills you he will have to take the consequences because our patience is at an end."

"Of course," said Bassin seriously, "we are only supposing all this about Senss, aren't we?"

"Are we? Why should he want to kill you? No, child, I'll tell you what we'll do. I'll go and interview Mr. Simplon again, confront him with what I call our knowledge and *you* call our suppositions, and see what he will tell us."

"I don't like it much. Suppose we really are barking up the wrong tree? We don't want Simplon wise to us, do we?"

"The other thing to do is to find Mr. Carn, a task which, up to the present, has proved impossible, even to the police, who are accustomed to finding needles in haystacks."

"Yes, but—"

“What do you yourself make of the hand and the ears, child? The motive here is not accounted for yet.”

“It certainly sounds like Nazi frightfulness. Oh, I don’t know. Personally, I think it’s all too vague, and much too unsatisfactory to proceed on. Why not let the police continue along their lines for a bit, and see what they can dig out? You could give them the information. After all, it’s their job, isn’t it?”

“Why do you think Mr. Carn remains in hiding, child, instead of making his escape?”

“Afraid of the police. After all, they are fairly hot on his trail, you know.”

“Why do you suppose that order (forged signature or not) was given, cancelling the publication of the book?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why have Saxant and Senss resolutely refused to allow you to see a copy of the printed book?”

“Oh, they give various reasons.”

“All unsatisfactory. There was only one reason, and that you have not been given.”

“You mean there’s something in the book—yes, but all the subscribers will see it, and I can borrow a copy. I’ve got a list of their names, and some of them I could get at, I’m perfectly sure.”

“Has it never struck you, child, that the book was not intended for English readers at all? There *are* no subscribers, in the ordinary meaning of the word. The copies were to be gifts from Mr. Carn to a small, select, literary circle; to a circle, which so far as I am able to discover, will not regard the subject-matter, but merely the style, as important. The plot against Mr. Carn has been made by a masterly brain, which then failed, for a split second, and, having failed so far, went on, in the recognised Nazi manner, to make some bad mistakes. Look here.”

She drew her note-book towards her.

“Just half a second,” said Bassin. He was out of his chair and across the lawn in a flash. Suddenly a shot sounded, and, on the instant Bassin cleared the hedge over which the athletic young vicar had hurdled earlier in the day, there was a shout and a scuffling noise.

Mrs. Bradley opened her large penknife and, with a fierce grin of anticipation, made for the scene of action at a creditable gallop. Her presence was unnecessary, however. The powerful Bassin was on top of the gunman and was engaged in the pleasing and satisfactory pastime of banging his head against the bole of the nearest tree.

“Silly fellow,” said Mrs. Bradley softly, looking down indulgently upon the stunned man. “Remain on guard, Justus,” she added, “whilst I get Célestine to bring out the clothes-line, and then, when we have tied him up securely, I can attend to his injuries.”

“He hasn’t any injuries. Skull like teak,” observed Bassin, pushing his captive’s beard out of the way and then loosening his collar. “But wouldn’t you have thought that one dose of being knocked about would have been enough for him?”

“Well, I don’t know, child. He probably has a very good motive for risking it again. He told me, at my last visit to him, that he was desperately afraid of Mr. Senss. This may be—”

The gunman opened his eyes, blinked, as he felt the pain of his battered head, and then cursed his companions fluently and gutterally for a minute and a quarter.

“He’s all right,” said Bassin, relieved at this volubility. “And now, you silly fathead,” he demanded, “what do you mean by popping off guns at us like that?”

“You send for the police?” asked the captive, in what sounded like hopeful tones.

“I should—” Bassin began, but Mrs. Bradley interrupted him.

"Justus," she said, "I think you'd better go and search for the bullet. It may be needed."

She waved him away before he could say any more, and Bassin, completely mystified but charmingly obedient, took himself off.

"And now," said Mrs. Bradley, "what is the meaning of this?"

She bent over, raised the recumbent man to a sitting posture, arranged him so that the sun was not in his eyes, and then sat back and regarded him with the bright, unemotional eyes of a bird watching a worm.

"You make the arrest?" said Simplon. "You telephone for the police, isn't it, and I shall go to prison? You save me again, I think."

"Again?"

"It was you that hid me in the chimney, I think, and made me so that I am taken to the hospital, there guarded from my enemies, isn't it?"

"Is it? Anyway," she added briskly, "that is all over now. You must do as I told you. Get away from here. Go back to your own country. In a few day, here, we shall be at war. You don't want to be interned."

"But the book I told you about?"

"Don't worry. Our Government and yours know all about the book. The printing press will be seized by force, if necessary. Mr. Saxant won't fight."

"He is not innocent."

"I know he isn't. But he's been implicated chiefly by accident. No, his partner is our man."

"Senss, you mean?"

"Yes, I mean Senss. When did you discover that the press was a cover for Nazi Secret Service work, and the passing on of information?"

"Senss and I, we play chess together, as I told you. One night, not so long—two months perhaps—just before that poor lady is murdered—he loses a game, and he says it is

bad luck to lose the lead—until then, you must understand, we had been equal, in drawn games and with the games we win. Now I am one in front, and Senss, he does not like that. He is Prussian. He cannot bear it. I am of Saarbruecken. I do not mind.”

He smiled, and Mrs. Bradley cackled.

“Then I say, to comfort him, that we shall remember to ourselves the games all over again, to make sure it is as he says, and I am ahead, because I say I have lost count, and perhaps he is not, after all, behind in the games. He, like all the Nazis, a child is, and cries when he loses. So then it is the accident, which has happened. Senss a piece of paper from his pocket takes out, and he puts it back quickly, but I have seen. It is a letter he is to post, and it is directed to the Saar, to a village I do not know. And I say, because I am innocent that anything is wrong: ‘Why do you address your letter so? No village of that name in the Saar district is, my good friend.’

“He then asks me, quite quietly, but I am on my guard, because his voice is dangerous, what I mean. I say I am a native of Saarbruecken, and I know all the villages in that whole district, and that I notice that he his letter has addressed to a place that is not.”

“Interesting,” said Mrs. Bradley. “Why didn’t you tell our police?”

“I am still German. I am not naturalised. Senss is naturalised Englishman since Hitler began. Me they will believe much less than him. Later he says I am to keep my mouth shut about the Saar, and that if I write to my relations any more, they will be put into concentration camps.

“So I do not write, although I wish to know how my brother is getting on, because, although he conforms, he is not a good Nazi, and they know, I think, and I am always wishing to know how it is with him, because the Gestapo, in

peace or in war, it is everywhere, and always very wicked and very cruel.

"But I know that I have found out something that Senss does not wish, and that I have to be very careful. So I am very careful. That is to say, I go and play chess just as often, but I stay in my house at night and I do not mention letters, or anything that might make angry my friend Senss. But also I watch. Then one day Senss he says to me that he is not satisfied. That was the day that your Herr Bassin meets me on the top of the stairs outside Senss's office. He tells me my step I must carefully watch. There is a book he says, which he shall send to the Gestapo. It has my brother's name in it, and—the rest you know."

Bassin had returned by this time, and had heard the last two or three sentences.

"Go and ring up the police, Justus," said Mrs. Bradley. "We are going to give Mr. Simplon in charge. What is your real name, Mr. Simplon?"

"My name he is Merzigger. Is it Senss who has told you I am Simplon?"

"Yes."

"And you are going to have me arrested?"

"Yes. It will be safest."

"My good friend, twice I think you my life save. But here I stay and be interned. I do not go back to Germany, my dear Germany, while she is mad. One day she will be sane again, kind and good. Then I return, and she welcomes me."

Justus came back to say that the police were on their way.

"But you know," he added, drawing her aside so that Merzigger could not hear, "I couldn't find that bullet."

"There was no bullet fired. Mr. Merzigger would not harm a hair of our heads, I am certain."

"Then why should we have him arrested?"

"It is his best chance of safety until we catch Senss and Carn. Senss, I fancy, should soon be under lock and key

himself. Carn, we (or the police) have still to find. I'm afraid I have deceived you, Justus," she added. "I was responsible for the injuries to Mr. Simplon and for putting him in the chimney. George, and a couple of men he co-opted for the task, made a very good job, I thought. The injuries, although not serious, were obviously genuine, and necessitated the patient's being removed to a hospital. This time Mr. Simplon-Merzigger has done just enough to get himself arrested. I wonder how long the police will be? I don't want to keep the poor man tied up like this a minute longer than we can help."

"Well, why not send over for Wells, or, better still, bring out Henri armed with a soup ladle or something?"

"A good idea," said Mrs. Bradley. She hastened indoors, and soon her chef, sufficiently armed, appeared upon the scene, and stood by whilst Bassin and Mrs. Bradley untied Simplon's bonds. The period of guard duty, from the point of view of Henri, who had donned a dark blue beret and was armed with his most formidable pastry board, which he carried under his arm, was all too short. The police arrived, the sergeant was taken aside by Mrs. Bradley, and then Simplon was taken in charge, placed beside a constable at the back of a police car, and rushed away to the police station where he was kindly but firmly locked away in a cell.

"But what on earth is it all about?" demanded Bassin, when the police and their prisoner—the latter bowing in grateful farewell to Mrs. Bradley from beside his escort—had vanished round the bend in the lane.

"As I have suggested that the Foreign Office should take over the Saxant and Senss printing press, the chances are that the point will soon be cleared up, child. We must interview Mr. Simplon-Merzigger again, however, and find out the significance of his other name being Bonner."

"Perhaps," said Bassin, grinning, "as you seem to be turning all we've found out upside down, it would appeal to

you if the name turned out, not to be Simplon's other name, but Senss's!"

"Good heavens, child!" said Mrs. Bradley. "Where are those uncorrected proofs?"

"At the office."

"George!" called Mrs. Bradley, in a state of unwonted agitation. "George! George! George!"

"But, you know," said Bassin, "I almost could recite that beastly proof by heart. In one place, 'Donner' comes in front of the German for 'in April,' and in the other place—it's only mentioned twice—it comes to make the word 'Thursday'—'*Donnerstag*.'"

"So that possibly, in the printed version, those words will read: 'Bonner in April'—which might make sense in a Foreign Office document—and 'Bonner's day,' which again might refer to some special date known to the recipient of the message."

"Bonner, then, need not be anybody's name? It could simply be a code message?"

"It is, of course, a possibility, child, and we must not lose sight of possibilities."

"Another thought strikes me," said Bassin, much encouraged. "How does all this connect up with Lyle's printing press? Senss, you remember, was one of the people who went over it."

"Distribution of the books was perhaps a problem. All Lyle's overseas deliveries go by way of Liverpool in Lyle's own lorries. I can see that the Secret Service people—the Nazi ones—could use the lorries. In fact, we know that Carn did use one for transporting the corpse of the tramp, and brought the body back later, using the same method. But I don't see how Liverpool would help them much in getting a consignment to Germany, unless they allowed the book to go to America first."

"It would help them if they were working in with the I.R.A. terrorists," said Bassin. "Had you thought of that?"

Mrs. Bradley said that she had, and that there was a good deal in the notion, and that she imagined that as soon as Senss heard that Simplon had been arrested, he would try to escape. Bassin was turning over in his mind the new course, which the investigation had taken, and Mrs. Bradley was wondering how long a start Senss would be able to get, after he had heard the news. There was little conversation on the journey until she said:

"I want you, child, to put through a telephone call to Mr. Senss at the printing press to find out whether he is there. Say that a bearded man shot at you this morning, and that you think it's Carn, and that the police want somebody to identify him. That should give him the impression that Carn, and not Simplon, has been arrested."

"I see. We just want to know that he hasn't already hopped it."

He returned with the news that Mr. Senss was in his office, was very busy, and was not at all sure that he could identify Mr. Carn, as he had not met him often and thought most Englishmen, in any case, looked alike.

"Here, he's hedging," said Bassin, at the end of this report of the conversation. "Bad sign, isn't it? I say, I suppose we're on the right track, and that Simplon hasn't been leading us up the garden?"

"I think we are on the right track, but I do wish we could discover where Mr. Carn is. You see, there are the suspicious movements of the man who climbed out of the window—"

"I say, he couldn't have been bearded then, could he?"

"Why not?"

"Well, those women who swore it was Mabb—oh, no, of course! They did see Mabb, but wouldn't swear to the time. They never saw Carn—if Carn it was—at all. That was the racket, wasn't it?"

Mrs. Bradley got through to the police and then rang up her son.

“Good gracious, Mother!” said Ferdinand Lestrangle. “You haven’t got on to the origin of that Damn and Blast code of the Nazis’, have you? They’ve been trying to check up on that for months. A village that isn’t on the map? Really!”

He rang off before Mrs. Bradley could reply, but when she told Bassin of the question he remarked: “D. and B. Damn and Blast. So it *is* dirty work at the crossroads! Hats off to you, although, of course, the whole credit is due to Carey and myself.”

He grinned at Mrs. Bradley, and then added: “And if it hadn’t been for Mrs. Carn we shouldn’t have tumbled to any of it. She was the original Damn and Blast merchant, always mixing up the two letters. In fact, you know, if she hadn’t typed Tom Bowling as Tom Dowling, and that with a small initial letter, I doubt whether any of the Donner-Bonner business would have struck us. It was purely a printer’s error, the only one that got past Senss’s eagle eye, and that’s what’s cooked their goose for them. I bet if he hadn’t been going to doctor up and collar the book, he’d have spotted the mistake directly.”

“Not necessarily, child. Foreigners know lots about our language, but probably very little about our national songs. To Mr. Senss ‘Tom Dowling’ was as good as ‘Tom Bowling,’ I’ve no doubt. But, as you say, Mrs. Carn has had her revenge.”

• CHAPTER 14 •

The Margin of Error

“‘Grammercy,’ said the lady, ‘I ask the head of this false knight Abellius, the most outrageous murderer that liveth.’”

•1•

“Now, don’t, please, either of you, be tedious,” said Carey. “I simply want the plain facts.”

He and Bassin, Jenny, Mrs. Bradley, Jonathan Mabb—enjoying a short weekend—and Carey’s young son, the baby Timothy, were all on the pig farm looking at the pigs.

“Well, as soon as the inspector got on to the idea that it was Senss he was checking up on, things began to move. To begin with, the office boy, under persuasion—” began Bassin.

“From you?”

“Well, I did happen to know, from you and Mrs. Bradley, that he’d had a good shot at burning out the printing press, didn’t I?”

“Go on.”

“Yes, well, the boy swore Senss was out on the afternoon when Mrs. Carn was murdered, and it turns out that it was a most unusual thing for him to be out in the afternoon at all. Saxant was extremely happy-go-lucky—

worked like a coxswainless four when he was interested and in the mood, otherwise gave the press a complete miss for whole days at a time. But Senss, on this Intelligence stuff, put in a good eight-hour day always, and mostly was there when the office boy went home."

"What about the car?"

"Funny thing about that. It was a hired one. He hired it *without* the beard on, and took it back *with*, thus confusing the owner considerably. Still, although the police found out all right that the car had been hired on that day, they couldn't get much out of it, because it was hired in the name of Simplon. Simplon, tackled, admitted to having been out in a car that day, but said it was his own. And this has been corroborated by a couple of Boys Scouts, who noticed it particularly because it was lettered 'HOT.'"

"But what I can't make out is how on earth anybody but Carn could have hit upon that five minutes when Mrs. Carn was alone, in order to kill her, grab the cash-box, and run to where he had a car waiting."

"But that means you're assuming that Senss killed Mrs. Carn, and, if he did, and Carn didn't, it makes it look an unpremeditated sort of business, whereas it couldn't have been anything of the kind."

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Bradley.

"Now don't you start," grinned Bassin. "I thought we had decided that the murder of the tramp and the death of Mrs. Carn were, so to speak, all of a piece. The stealing of the cash-box had to appear to be the motive for the murder. Allowing for the fact that I know you're pulling my leg, how about it?"

"I admit that the stealing of the cash-box had to be made to appear as the motive for the murder of Mrs. Carn," Mrs. Bradley agreed. "Nevertheless, I think that the murder of Mrs. Carn *by her husband* was not only unpremeditated, but accidental. It was not Mr. Senss, with and without false beard, who hired the car in the name of Simplon and had it

waiting at the church. It was—as we decided a long time ago—Mr. Carn. But he had it there, not to help him escape the consequences of murder, but to get away quickly to the country where lay the murdered body of the tramp, so that he could prove, as it were, his own death.

“After he had left Mrs. Saxant, he went to his own house, watched Bassin leave, and then saw Senss, his associate in getting vital information from England to the Nazi Government, break in by way of the French doors. Carn, I believe, dashed after him, and snatched the cash-box, intending to strike Senss with it. Instead, he struck Mrs. Carn, and her death was the result of accident, although Senss intended murder.

“Knowing that his object was achieved, Senss immediately made off.”

“But in which direction?” demanded Bassin.

“Obviously, towards the village—towards the horse-trough end of the footpath. Then he escaped across fields, otherwise you would have seen him.”

“How do you know that the man who bribed the girl was Carn, and not Senss?” asked Carey.

“Don’t worry Aunt Adela!” said Jenny. “This is really terribly exciting. Why do you want to interrupt?”

Mrs. Bradley grinned amiably.

“I think the child would have remarked upon Mr. Senss’s voice. As it was, she merely said that the man reminded her of Santa Claus. Mr. Senss has a pronounced German accent, which he cannot disguise. Children are very quick to notice peculiarities of speech. I feel sure that in the talk I had with her she would have mentioned it.”

“If we could only find Carn,” said Bassin gloomily, “we could have him identified. The police are certain to have got Senss by now, I should think.”

“Yes, they’ve got him,” Mrs. Bradley admitted.

“Then the tramp was murdered by Carn because he was afraid of Senss?”

“Not in the way you mean. He was afraid of Senss for the reason that you would have been afraid of any—” Her voice trailed off. “No, no. Not if the medical evidence is right, and the tramp was killed *before* the death of Mrs. Carn,” she observed.

“*Could* the medical evidence be wrong?” enquired Carey suddenly.

“Taken in conjunction with the threatening letters, which I am positive no one but Mr. Carn could possibly have written, no, it could not,” said Mrs. Bradley, coming to a definite decision. “It means that Carn and Senss must have had a quarrel, and that Carn was afraid of Senss, and wanted Senss to be able to assume his death. So he paved the way with the letters—that much we agreed upon before—and—”

“I’ve got it, I think,” said Jenny. “Don’t you think that the quarrel between Mr. Senss and Mr. Carn was over Mrs. Carn?”

All her hearers but one gaped, guffawed, or grinned. Her husband even went so far as to tap his forehead significantly.

“Go on, child,” said Mrs. Bradley gently.

Pausing only long enough to thrust out her tongue at her husband. Jenny continued:

“Don’t you think that Mr. Senss might have been awfully worried when he saw Mr. Carn’s corrected typescript? I mean, if they’d both spent months and months—”

“Years, more probably,” interpolated Mrs. Bradley.

“—collecting up all that information for Mr. Carn to put into a book which they *had* to camouflage somehow, because everybody would know he’d been working on a book all that time—”

“Good Lord!” said Carey. “So *that* accounts for the hundred presentation copies, none of which we were allowed to look at. Of course, *they* are not quite like the

uncorrected proof, and *that's* not like the copy or copies that are going across to this non-existent village on the Saar!"

"Yes, the hundred copies were camouflage, and Mr. Geoffrey Saxant, you remember, wasn't anxious to print them. It was Mr. Senss who urged him to consent. Go on, Jenny, my dear."

"Well, Mr. Senss didn't like the *b.* and *d.* alterations all over the typescript—because he was a very nervous, sensitive kind of man—just the type, really, for a spy—and he asked Mr. Carn what about it, and probably taxed him with having let his wife into official Nazi secrets which she had no right to know. Of course, she didn't know the secrets really. She was just a natural, psychological *b.* and *d.* mixer."

"I see it now," said Bassin. "So Carn then realised that not only his wife (for whom he didn't care all that much, as it happened) but he himself was in danger, and, knowing something about the Nazis and their methods, he thought he'd better make some sort of disappearance. Is that it?"

"Yes, I believe so. The most convincing disappearance is death; and here comes a curious point, solved for me by Noel Wells, who, as he himself is almost the first to admit, does usually, although accidentally, hit the nail on the head. I think that the first feelings and attitude of Mr. Carn towards the tramp were kindness and the desire to assist an unfortunate man. Kindness and hospitality, as Justus has impressed on me, are noticeable qualities in Mr. Carn.

"Then came the temptation. The tramp was not only in his power, but he was even rather like him in appearance. The man was a vagrant, and, possibly (Carn would persuade himself), useless and worthless—a parasite, in fact. A man who, whatever was done for him and to assist him, would never stand on his feet. Why not make use of him?"

"Yes, but why the hand and the ears?" asked Carey. "That's the weirdest part."

"I don't altogether agree. Mr. Carn had little sense of horror, if I may so express my meaning. We can tell that

from his books. He probably thought that to send Mrs. Saxant a pair of ears *which had never been pierced for earrings* would be the safest message he could send to tell her that he was still alive. It did not occur to him that the hideous sight would so much upset her that she wouldn't trouble to see whose ears they were, or, rather, whether they were Mr. Carn's ears or those of somebody else."

"Well, but the hand?"

"Some queer idea of making sure that the tramp was identified as Mr. Carn himself. *He* knew that the loss of the right hand was part of the punishment for wilful murder in the fifteenth century, and he assumed, correctly as it happened, that others would know it too. He cut off the hand after he had accidentally killed his wife, and as he assumed that her death would be traced to him, or that Mr. Senss would report on it to the police, he decided to indict himself (as it were) of her murder. Very, very interesting indeed."

She ruminated.

"Go on, love. Tell us all about the code itself," said Carey. "Does, or does not, the corrected proof in the cash-box come into it at all?"

"Oh, yes, I think it does, although, of course, Mr. Carn's reason for making off with the box after he had killed his wife was an instinctive reaction not to leave behind him the weapon of offence. Incidentally, nothing could have been proved from the condition of the cash-box (except that it had been used to kill that poor woman) since Mr. Carn's fingerprints would have been all over it, for legitimate reasons, anyhow. But people rarely think clearly in moments of panic."

"But it was because I had been sent for that Mrs. Carn died," said Bassin soberly. "I mean, Carn must have let out that I was coming, and then, I suppose, Senss turned nasty."

"It is much more likely that Mr. Carn let it out to Mrs. Saxant, and so it got round to Mr. Senss," said Mrs. Bradley.

"I don't suppose Carn realised that Senss was also in love with her," said Carey. "But let's hear more about the code."

"Well," said Mrs. Bradley, seating herself on one of the deck-chairs which Mrs. Ditch and Our Walt had brought from the house, "the alterations in the book, so that any extra code material could be inserted—we have to remember that they were gaining information whenever they could—did not appear on either the corrected or the uncorrected proof, except, by accident, the word 'Bonner' in place of the word 'Donner.' That word only appeared once, in front of the German for 'in April.' This mistake was an oversight on the part of Mr. Senss. Whether it was or (as is far more likely) was *not* a part of a code message, the fact remains that it probably didn't matter in the slightest. Anybody who knew even the rudiments of German would take it for a printer's error (as indeed it was) and take for granted it was a misprint for the phrase 'thunder in April,' which is a possible thing, and would cause no particular comment. But Senss, of course, had given himself away by referring to Simplon as Bonner, and that was why he became so very worried when he saw the mistake on the proof. 'Bonner,' I think, is the keyword of their code.

"Have you read Sigmund Freud's *Psychopathology and Everyday Life*? A fascinating study. The explanation of this curious lapse on Senss's part is contained in it."

Carey and Jenny both said that they had read the book. Jonathan Mabb, who was following all the explanations very carefully, admitted to having picked up the sixpenny edition on a bookstall, but explained that he had not had time to read it yet.

"How does it affect Senss?" asked Carey.

"In this way. Mr. Senss knew that Justus had encountered Mr. Simplon on the landing, and, for some reason, he was irritated, that is to say, the balance of his mind was slightly disturbed, by the incident. He did not

want casual visitors meeting Mr. Simplon outside his office. Mr. Simplon, you see, had practically signed his own death-warrant by trying to put Mr. Senss right about the names of Saar villages."

"In this startled frame of mind he is caught out, quite simply, by his subconscious mind, which, at no bidding from him, does its best to minimise the awkwardness of the situation," said Jenny intelligently. "Mr. Senss, I mean."

"And, in the usual crackpot way of the subconscious, goes and puts its foot in it," said Carey, giving his wife a sharp slap. "So much I perceive and understand, O Theophilus, but—"

"But I don't," said Jenny, returning the buffet with interest, whilst Timothy whacked his father's leg with considerable enthusiasm. "Do, both of you, be quiet, and let Aunt Adela finish what she's saying."

"You interrupted her," said Carey. "And, anyway, I can finish it myself. Why shouldn't I show off, too? Listen to your husband. The subconscious, anxious to repair the bloomer, thinks it will give its unfortunate possessor a break, so it reminds him of his student days at the German university of Bonn, where he was young, carefree, and happy, and didn't have any Simplons and things on his conscience."

"Yes, but why should it choose Bonn? Just because the keyword, a thing always on his mind, happened to be Bonner, I suppose," said Bassin, anxious to help.

"Plus the fact that it disliked the name Simplon for some reason which the conscious mind of Senss has probably forgotten," said Mrs. Bradley.

"Yes, I expect the chap had his pocket picked going through the Simplon tunnel, and his subconscious, afraid of reminding him of the fact by letting him say the name 'Simplon,' chose Bonn, with the best of intentions but the most horribly awkward result," said Carey, with a certain amount of flippancy, but possibly correctly, his aunt said afterwards.

"I should think so, if it meant poor Justus being shot at simply because he'd heard the name Bonner," said Jenny, going off the point in a refreshing and characteristic way.

"Anyway, the police have bottled Senss up all right," said Bassin, with satisfaction. "But I do wish to goodness we could get hold of Carn."

"If the police can't, we can't," said Carey. "It's no joke trying to get out of the country when they're after you, though, all the same. He's somewhere in England still."

"Well, we've had some fun," remarked Bassin.

"Not much fun, that I can see, in people being murdered," said Jenny, restraining Timothy, who was trying to ride on a pig.

•2•

The exhibition of Surrealist art, which a fascinated Mrs. Bradley and a bewildered and slightly disconcerted Bassin had already visited, was greeted by Carey with a flow of loud and ribald comment which his wife, who had accompanied the party to London, leaving Timothy in charge of Mrs. Ditch, did her best to stem and control.

"Dear child," said his aunt affectionately, as they paused before an exhibit entitled "Calving Cow" which consisted of several empty tins which had once contained soup, a pot of geraniums, a hen, modelled in clay and painted bright pink, standing on its head in more clay (kept wet by a filthy-looking piece of horse-blanket which protruded with obvious intent from the mackintosh covering), a baby's feeding-bottle with one end stuck in a football bladder, and various scattered objects, among which a complete set of Halma, one large dark red egg

painted on ship's canvas, a set of fire-irons, and an old fashioned pair of corsets immediately met the eye.

"You spoke, love?" said her nephew, taking out his handkerchief and ostentatiously mopping his brow, to the great delight of a couple of girls who were giggling their way round the art gallery.

"I was about to suggest that I would prefer that you were not forcibly ejected from this place until we have visited the adjoining room," remarked Mrs. Bradley gently.

"I, forcibly ejected? You're thinking of pubs. Pubs are respectable. It doesn't matter what you do here."

"Nevertheless," said his aunt, bestowing on the gigglers such a demoniac grin that they were alarmed, and made for the archway into the next room, "I feel that you will be much more usefully employed in preserving a calm and judicial demeanour in the face of these extraordinary monstrosities than if you pursue your present hypersensitive course of behaviour. You are to make it your duty to catch my eye whenever you see Mr. Carn. You saw him at the Sanctuary, and ought to know him again."

"Just as you say, love." He composed his handsome features, and held her hand tightly. Mrs. Bradley replied with a sudden steel pressure of her claw-like fingers, which made him gasp, and then led him to the next picture. This was called "Rail Gauge" and, looking earnestly at it, Carey was eerily aware that behind the turnip lantern, which was the central note of the composition, something alive—a guinea pig, rabbit, or monkey—was restlessly scuffling. Occasionally an eye or a nibbling mouth could be seen through one of the crudely-cut holes in the turnip, which, in any case, happened to be a giant swede.

"Oh, dear! It needs the R.S.P.C.A." said Jenny, standing in some distress of mind before the exhibit. Carey, however, had had his attention distracted. He touched his aunt's arm.

"Surely that's the inspector from Falshanger?" he said very quietly in her ear.

“Yes, child. Somewhere else in the galleries are Jonathan Mabb, at least three constables, a Scotland Yard detective, and our dear Justus.” She refused to say any more, and the little party of three wandered from revolting to merely puzzling exhibits, and from the obscene to the ludicrous, until, in Mrs. Bradley’s opinion, they had made a thorough survey of the room.

They then passed through an archway into the adjoining room. Here there were four large and many smaller works. Carey again slid his hand into that of his aunt. She gave it gentle pressure this time, and said very quietly:

“Where?”

“The south wall looks the most likely,” said Carey, who had a painter’s appreciation of the cardinal points of the compass.

“Yes, I thought so,” his aunt remarked, standing before a kind of grotto in which a catheter and a volume of Carlyle’s *French Revolution* gave quite a striking point to the title of the composition. This, painted above and below the amber bulb in a beautifully-constructed “Stop and Go” traffic lights model, which was worked by means of a small electric motor, was “Erewhon Re-visited.”

The exhibit on the south wall was larger. On a stretch of what looked like deep sand—it was raised to a depth of some four feet from the floor, and was probably feathers of down sprinkled with a layer of sand, lay three human heads, a large bunch of bananas, and several alarm clocks. The background piece was a painting of sheep, apparently grazing up the pillars of the Acropolis. All three heads on the sand were closely shaved, and the skulls gleamed white except where purple spots had been painted on them. The eyes of all three were closed, and the corpse-like effect had been further enhanced by the fact that not only were the heads shaved, but the eyebrows had also disappeared. Horror had then been achieved by the painting, also in purple, of a thick square on each face. This seemed to cut

up the faces so that recognition of them would have been extremely difficult. The nostrils were touched in, rather horribly, with red. The lips were apart and were thickly coated with purple, and the eyelids were blackened with grease.

Leaving Carey to admire this striking exhibit, which was entitled "Keats with a Fawn," Mrs. Bradley and Jenny moved on to the next, and gradually worked round to the opening, where they paused for a second before they continued their inspection. Carey, turning, caught his aunt's eye, and nodded.

The police, answering Mrs. Bradley's brief but prearranged signal, now came through the archway.

"Mr. Carn is on the right of the picture," said Mrs. Bradley, pointing to the heads. "His are the ears filled with sand."

About the Author



Gladys Mitchell was born in the village of Cowley, Oxford, in April 1901. She was educated at the Rothschild School in Brentford, the Green School in Isleworth, and at Goldsmiths and University Colleges in London. For many years Miss Mitchell taught history and English, swimming, and games. She retired from this work in 1950 but became so bored without the constant stimulus and irritation of teaching that she accepted a post at the Matthew Arnold School in Staines, where she taught English and history, wrote the annual school play, and coached hurdling. She was a member of the Detection Club, the PEN, the Middlesex Education Society, and the British Olympic Association. Her

father's family are Scots, and a Scottish influence has appeared in some of her books.